

The Sovereignty of God: In Creation, Salvation, and Providence

- I. I. **Introduction:** It is obvious that in our nation there is increasing disrespect for the Bible and for God. This is true, in my opinion, because in most pulpits and publications the **true God of the Bible** is not being presented. Rather, a distorted caricature of the true and living God is being presented. This “god” is egalitarian. He is becoming increasingly “politically correct.” He is “user friendly.” He would not dare to offend our sense of fairness. He would never violate our sacred “free will.” He is more like an understanding and indulgent grandfather than He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Ruler of the universe. Even Bible-believing Christians are often guilty of these gross misrepresentations of God. We are often guilty of what God accused the wicked of in Ps. 50:21, “...thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself...” As A. W. Pink writes, “The God of the twentieth century is a helpless, effeminate being who commands the respect of no really thoughtful man. The God of the popular mind is the creation of a maudlin sentimentality.” The result of all this is that ours is an age of irreverence, and consequently, of lawlessness.
- II. II. The **remedy** for this is to let the Bible speak for itself as to who God really is. While God does reveal Himself in nature, a much fuller and more complete revelation of Him is to be found in the sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. It should be obvious that I am approaching this subject as an avowed believer in the **inspiration of the Scriptures**. I believe the Word of God to be complete and infallible. I am approaching this issue from the position of “what is written?” Those who do not hold that the Scriptures are inspired claim to have the right to decide “what ought to be written.” They sit in judgment of the Word of God and pick and choose what they want from it. They manufacture their own ideas of who God is from their fallible and uninformed imaginations. The Bible believer, on the other hand, gladly accepts God as He is presented in the word of God. God appears in the Bible as the **Sovereign** Creator, Sustainer, and Ruler of the entire universe.
- a. a. Definition of God’s sovereignty: When we say that God is sovereign, we affirm His right to govern the universe which He has made for His own glory, just as He pleases. To say that God is sovereign is to say that He does **as** He pleases, **only** as He pleases, **always** as He pleases!
- b. b. To say that He is sovereign is to say that God answers to no law higher than Himself.
- c. c. This sovereignty of God is explicitly affirmed in the Scriptures of which the following two are a fair representation:

- i) i) Ps. 115:3, “But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.”
- ii) ii) Dan. 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?”

III. III. This sovereignty of God is manifested in **Creation**.

- a. a. God is indeed sovereign in creation, as He is in everything. God is **self-existent**. This means that He is **eternal**. He has always been. As Moses said in Psalm 90:2 “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.” He is **independent**. He needs nothing outside Himself to maintain His existence. Paul taught this in Acts 17:25 “Neither is [God] worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things...” He is **self-sufficient**. This means that He derives joy, pleasure, and satisfaction from Himself, and is not dependent on any outside source for these things. That is why Paul referred to Him as the “blessed God” in 1 Timothy 1:11.

These things being true, God was not compelled to create the universe and the inhabitants of it. He did not need the universe to complete Himself, seeing He was already absolutely complete and perfect in Himself. He did not need created things and beings to enhance His happiness, as He was perfectly satisfied in Himself. Therefore, God could choose either to create or not to create. Once He had chosen to create, He could choose how to create. He was totally sovereign in the choice to create, and He was sovereign in how He wanted to go about the work of creation. There was no one to advise or criticize Him as He created. This is expressed in Revelation 4:11 “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and **for thy pleasure** they are and were created.” God did not create the world by the democratic process! He created as the **Absolute Sovereign**.

- b. a.
- c. b. The Bible believer is compelled to believe that He created the entire universe *ex nihilo*. Hebrews 11:3 affirms that “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” Faith accepts what God’s Word has to say about the matter. The consistent Bible believer is compelled to believe that God sovereignly spoke all creation into existence in six twenty-four hour days just as the Genesis account declares. Those who hold to the infallible inspiration of Scripture believe what is plainly stated in Ps. 33: 6, 9, “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth...For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.”

- d. c. Even for those who do not have faith, it is **absolutely inexcusable** for them to deny the existence of a Supreme Being who is obviously a Master Designer, who created the incredibly intricate universe. God has revealed Himself to all in His creation. As Paul wrote in Romans 1: 19,20 “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are **clearly seen**, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are **without excuse...**” When people deny the creative work of God, it is not because there is a lack of evidence for His existence and work. It is because of an **intense bias against God** that ignores or distorts the clear evidence. It has been well said that “No one is so blind as he who will not see.” The power of self-deception and self-flattery in the human heart is truly amazing.
- e. d. This creative work of God is plain in every aspect of the universe, from the vast domains of interplanetary space, to the tiniest molecule. Intricate design is apparent everywhere to the careful and thoughtful observer. Myriad examples of this orderliness could be given, but we must confine our selves to a very few representative ones. In their recent book, *Rare Earth*, University of Washington scientists Peter D. Ward and Donald C. Brownlee have listed a very unique set of circumstances which permits life to exist on planet earth. A partial listing of these circumstances include a perfectly placed moon to control tides, climate, and tilt; Jupiter so placed to act as a shield from asteroids and meteorites; and a delicately balanced atmosphere which includes just enough carbon to allow for a rich biodiversity. It requires a strong preconceived mind-set to deny that the precision fine-tuning necessary for earth to sustain life, came about by chance.
- f. e. The common explanation of the origin of the universe, along with earth and its inhabitants, is usually purely naturalistic. For the Bible believer such an explanation is untenable. It is a well-known fact that in the academic community, the theory of naturalistic evolution has held sway for a number of decades. However, in recent years, there have arisen significant challenges to this theory from a number of sources. This is usually a well-kept secret. The secular press rarely reports the increasing disarray within the ranks of the materialists and naturalists on the subject of origins. Even many pure secularists have been compelled to admit that the amazing complexity and intricacy of the universe, especially earth and its inhabitants, could not possibly be the result of chance. Let us look at a few of the challenges to naturalistic evolution from various segments of the academic community:
- i) i) Darwinists are finding themselves on the defensive by the emergence of the so-called **Intelligent Design** movement. One of the earliest proponents of this movement is a UC Berkeley law professor, Phillip Johnson. He wrote a

book titled *Darwin on Trial* which was published in 1991. In this book he examined the evidence for Darwinistic evolution with the eye of a lawyer. His conclusion was that Darwinists prematurely accepted Darwin's theory as fact, and have been scrambling ever since to find evidence for it. As they have encountered insurmountable difficulties with the theory, they have clung to it out of fear of encouraging those who espouse that God created the universe the way the Bible said that He did. In doing this, Johnson asserts, they have turned Darwinism into their own religion. They have tried to posit that the conflict is between religion and science, whereas the controversy is really between two conflicting worldviews. Each side interprets the evidence according to presuppositions. Each side has to make assumptions based on the observed data. Each side has to make some of these assumptions based on "faith." The religionists base their faith about creation on the Biblical account. The evolutionists base their faith on certain conjectures of how the material universe came into being. In fact, none of the antagonists were present at the beginning of the universe to make personal observations! As John Weister, chairman of the Science Education Commission of the American Scientific Affiliation, has written, "Darwinism is **naturalistic philosophy masquerading as science.**"^{ii[i]} This is true in spite of the fact that many of the Darwinists have tried to elevate their tenuous theory to the position of a universally accepted truth. As Michael Denton points out, "once a community has elevated a theory into a self-evident truth, its defence becomes irrelevant and there is no longer any point in having to establish its validity by reference to empirical facts."^{iii[iii]}

- ii) ii) Another individual who has greatly contributed to the debate is Michael Behe, a professor of biochemistry at Lehigh University. He has written a book, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*, which was published in 1996. At this writing, the book is in its 16th printing. It has hit the secular community like an intellectual bomb. Dr. Behe has attacked the random selection of Darwinism at the molecular level, using information that has been discovered over the past 40 years or so. He has shown that even at the cellular level many structures are "**irreducibly complex.**" This simply means that all parts of a structure have to be present in order for the structure to work at all. This makes impossible that complex structures came about by slow, gradual changes as postulated by the Darwinists. He showed that the incredible complexity of a "Rube Goldberg" machine, each of whose parts are absolutely necessary for the machine to work at all, are not nearly so complex as is the mechanism by which blood clots. Behe's reasoning is so compelling that he has received a hearing even in the secular community.
- iii) iii) Writing a little earlier than the two we have already named was Michael Denton, an Australian medical doctor and scientist. In 1985 he published *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*. He revealed that there are many new developments in science that are challenging orthodox Darwinism. There have

been many new discoveries in molecular biology which reveal astounding complexity in the micro world. Mr. Denton writes, “It is difficult to think of a comparable decade in scientific history when fundamental knowledge increased as quickly as it did in biochemistry in the 1950s. Before 1950 hardly anything was known of the molecular basis of life; yet during the next ten years a succession of dramatic discoveries completely transformed the biological sciences and laid the foundation for a totally new description of life.”^{iii[iii]} As a result of these discoveries, Denton writes, “Molecular biology has shown that even the simplest of all living systems on earth today, bacterial cells, are exceedingly complex objects.”^{iv[iv]} After describing the incredible complexity of merely the single cell, and then escalating the discussion to a description of absolutely incomprehensible organs such as the human brain, Denton asks the penetrating question, “. . . Is it really credible that random processes could have constructed a reality, the smallest element of which—a functional protein or gene—is complex beyond our own creative capacities, a reality which is the very antithesis of chance, which excels in every sense anything produced by the intelligence of man?”^{v[v]}

- iv) iv) Another academic discipline from which the origin and development of life from random processes is increasingly seen as impossible is mathematics. William Dembski, a mathematician with two Ph.D’s, published a book in 1998, *The Design Inference: Eliminating Chance Through Small Probabilities*. He mathematically demonstrates the statistical impossibility of complex structures coming about by random chance, no matter how much time is involved.
- g. f. It is very interesting to note that there is a terrific warfare within the evolutionary community, itself. Andrew Brown amply documents this in a recently published new book, *The Darwin Wars*.^{vi[vi]} The “wars” are between the neo-Darwinists, who believe in slow, gradual, progressive change, and the punctuationalists, who believe that there are long periods of time when no evolutionary activity is going on. These periods are “punctuated” by sudden bursts of intense evolutionary progress. Even though neither of these schools of thought is creationist, they inadvertently help to prove the case for creation! The Neo-Darwinists convincingly disprove punctuationalism, while the punctuationalists disprove Darwinian gradualism. Even though these two groups are ardently opposed to each other, they form a united front against the hated doctrine of creationism. In a telling quote by John Maynard Smith, who is an eminent neo-Darwinist, he denigrated Stephen Jay Gould, a prominent advocate of punctuationalism, by saying that his “ideas are so confused as to be hardly worth bothering with.” Yet he said that Gould should not be publicly criticized “because he is at least on our side against the creationists.”^{vii[vii]}

- h. g. We will close this section of the discussion by giving a few examples of the extraordinary bias that many in the scientific community have against the idea that life did not come about by chance. This bias is really directed against the idea of a super-intelligent Creator.
- i) i) Harvard biologist Richard Lewontin has written that he is a materialist despite facts that militate against materialist theory. He has said that there is a “patent absurdity” inherent in some of these theories. However, he insists that “we cannot allow a divine foot in the door.”^{viii}^{viii}
- ii) ii) Stephen Jay Gould, famous Darwinist from Harvard, wrote in 1977, “The extreme rarity of transitional forms in the fossil record persists as the trade secret of paleontology.”^{ix}^{ix} In spite of this colossal lack of evidence, he holds to Darwinian evolution. That he is not influenced by the fact that the evidence does not exist reveals an entrenched bias that simply denies or distorts the plain evidence.
- iii) iii) One of the most incredible examples of this bias is revealed in a quote from Robert Shapiro, a professor of chemistry at New York University. He wrote that the day might come when all chemical experiments to discover a probable origin of life might fail. And new geological evidence may be discovered which would indicate a sudden appearance of life on earth. To sum up- all naturalistic explanations for the origin and development of the universe would be exhausted. Then Shapiro writes, “In such a case, some scientists might choose to turn to religion for an answer. Others, however, myself included, would attempt to sort out the surviving less probable scientific explanations in the hope of selecting one that was still more likely than the remainder.”^x^x Truly no one is so blind as he who will not see! As Michael Behe writes, “The reluctance of science to embrace the conclusion of intelligent design that its long, hard labors have made manifest has no justifiable excuse.”^{xi}^{xi}
- i. h. The bias shown by some evolutionists is often revealed in their being overly eager to find evidence to support their theory. This has caused them to be embarrassed by many hoaxes over a period of many years. One of the first was the infamous **Piltdown Man**. This was a fossilized skull “discovered” in 1911 along with a stone ax near Piltdown, a parish in East Sussex. The Piltdown Man was said to be a very early type of man who was an evolutionary precursor to modern man. For some forty years this skull was on exhibition in the London Museum and was pictured in countless high school textbooks. In 1953 Piltdown Man was declared to be a fraud. The skull was that of an ape which had been carefully scraped to make it look somewhat like a human skull and been treated with acids to counterfeit its age.

Another of many such embarrassments for the evolutionists was so-called **Nebraska Man**. This supposed stage of development in the human family tree was based on the discovery of a single tooth. One of the leading spokesmen for evolution during the 1920s was Henry Fairfield Osborn, the Director of the American Museum of Natural History. He made much of Nebraska Man and prominently featured him in his many newspaper articles and radio broadcasts. Unfortunately for Osborn, Nebraska Man had to be discarded when it was discovered that the **single tooth** from which he had been reconstructed came from an extinct pig! Many examples of such embarrassments could be given.

Very recently the prestigious and influential *National Geographic* published pictures of a fossil creature which was supposed to be a flying dinosaur. *National Geographic* held a news conference in October 1999 heralding this new discovery as a crucial missing link.^{xii[xiii]} Several prestigious scientists, who were properly skeptical, had warned them against this. However, in their zeal to publicize this strong evidence for evolution they proceeded with the publication. Soon they were embarrassed as the truth came out. Some Chinese farmers had become adept at gluing fossils together. In this case, the body turned out to be from a bird while the tail was from a dinosaur. This sort of thing has been going on since the early part of the Twentieth Century.

- j. i. In closing this section I admit again that my belief that God created the entire universe, living and nonliving, from absolutely nothing is based on my belief in the Bible. This is a matter of faith. However, this is not a blind, unintelligent faith. There is overwhelming evidence of Design in the entire universe, both macro and micro. In fact, as scientific disciplines such as microbiology, genetics and related fields push the limits of the known further and further, it becomes ever more apparent just how complex even the simplest living organisms are. It takes even more faith to believe that that these organisms evolved by chance than it does to believe in the Bible. This is not a contest between science and the Bible, it is a dispute over which faith to embrace. One faith readily accepts the Supernatural God, who is the Creator, Sustainer, and ultimate judge of the entire universe and all its creatures. The other faith, against overwhelming evidence, chooses to reject this possibility in favor of blind chance. Take your pick!
- k. j. What are the reasons for and the consequences of denying a Creator God? I believe that the primary reason for denying the Creator God is to get rid of the law-giving God. If there is no personal God, Who created the universe and its inhabitants, there is no law of God by which mankind is obligated to live. There is no objective standard of right and wrong. This is no basis for absolute morality. To any thinking person the implications of this are frightening. Anything that the powerful or the majority deem to be right is acceptable if there is no objective standard to live by. To borrow a sentence from the introduction to this paper: "The result of all this is that ours is an age of irreverence, and

consequently, of lawlessness.”

IV. IV. The Sovereignty of God in **Salvation**.

- a. a. As we study the work of God in salvation, I appeal to all to have an open mind. It has been said by some wag, “The mind is like a parachute, it works best when it is open!” Most people have deeply-entrenched, preconceived ideas of how God works in salvation. There are some expressions or concepts that people would solemnly swear are in the Bible, that are just not there. To really learn we must behave as the Bereans did who “received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” The well-known contemporary theologian, J. I. Packer, optimistically has written, “There are signs today of a new upsurge of interest in the theology of the Bible: a new readiness to test traditions, to search the Scriptures and to think through the faith.”^{xiii[xiii]}

Just as God is sovereign in creation, so He is sovereign in salvation. Many who can accept His sovereignty in creation find it very difficult to do so in the matter of salvation. However, God does not do the work of salvation by the democratic process, just as He didn’t operate in creation democratically.

A word of caution is in order as we examine the Scriptures to see what they teach in the matter of salvation. We must consider what the Bible says as a whole. This is what the theologians call the “analogy of the faith.” This means that the Scriptures must be understood as a whole, and that, properly understood, the Scriptures never contradict each other. Too many people “pick and choose” as they study the Bible. However, we cannot build a doctrine from one or two passages of Scripture.

It of course goes almost without saying that the only source of knowledge as to the nature of salvation comes from the Holy Bible. This is a doctrine of divine revelation. This is not something that one can philosophize about to come to the knowledge of the truth. This is not something about which one searches for empirical data in either the physical or metaphysical realm. These things being true, we must look extensively at Scripture to learn the truth that God has been pleased to reveal about salvation.

- b. b. A brief look at the Scriptures makes plain the facts that salvation is entirely of the Lord, and this salvation is dispensed according to His good pleasure and purpose, and for His glory. After learning in a very dramatic way that God is sovereign, Jonah proclaimed that “Salvation is of the LORD.”^{xiv[xiv]} Combining the ideas of God’s good pleasure in the bestowal of salvation and the glory that accrues to Him as a result of this bestowal Paul writes in Ephesians 1:4-6, “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that

we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, **according to the good pleasure of his will**, To the **praise of the glory of his grace**, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”

Stressing that salvation is according to the **definite purpose** of God Paul again writes in Ephesians 1:11 “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will...” Another more Scripture that emphasizes the **definite purpose** of God in salvation is found in 2 Timothy 1:9, “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to **his own purpose** and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began...” The final Scriptures that we shall look at concerning the **purpose of God** in salvation are found in the epistle to the Romans. We read in 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**.” It is recorded in Romans 9:11 “For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that **the purpose of God according to election** might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth...” These Scriptures make plain that salvation is not a haphazard enterprise. When God purposes to do something He does it. There is nothing that can go wrong or frustrate God when He purposes to save.

- c. c. It will be well here to examine why salvation is needed. What does mankind need to be saved from? Here, as in the creation of the universe, God was under no compulsion to create human beings. He was complete in Himself, and had perfect fellowship in His Trinitarian existence. He created the human race because it was His sovereign good pleasure to do so. He created mankind just as He intended to. It is plain from the Genesis account of creation that God was satisfied in what He had done. After He had completed the work of creation, including man “God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.”^{xv[xv]}
- d. d. At this time there was no sin in the world. God had made man upright.^{xvi[xvi]} However, for reasons known only to Himself, God made Adam and Eve liable to fall from this upright condition. Had He so desired He could have restrained them from falling into sin. He was not the author of their sin, but He allowed Satan to tempt them, and He did not prevent their fall. When they did fall, they plunged the entire human race into a condition of death. Paul puts this fact without dispute in Romans 5:12, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” In another place the Scriptures make plain that what happened in the Garden of Eden affected the entire human race. We read in Romans 5:19, “For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”

- e. e. What does it mean to be dead in trespasses and sins?^{xvii[xvii]} Well, dead means dead! It does not mean sick. It does not mean disabled. It does not mean partially incapacitated. Dead people can do absolutely nothing. They can do nothing by themselves and they cannot cooperate with anyone else. This is true in the physical realm and it is true in the spiritual realm. Those who are dead in sins cannot savingly even hear the words of Christ, let alone understand them.^{xviii[xviii]} Moreover, those who are dead in sin are vehement enemies to the true God of the Bible. This is plainly recorded in Romans 8:7, “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.”
- f. f. How, then, is it possible for one in this deplorable and helpless condition to be saved? This momentous question was asked and answered long ago in Matthew 19:25, 26, “When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.” Salvation of necessity must be a **sovereign act of God**. One who is dead in sin cannot save himself, nor even cooperate in his salvation. For one dead in trespasses and sins to be saved takes no less a miracle than the resurrection. Lazarus was unable to do anything until he had been raised from the dead. The one who is dead in sin is totally unable to do anything of a spiritual nature until he has had the gift of spiritual life sovereignly bestowed upon him by the Holy Spirit.
- g. g. The questions now are, to whom does God graciously bestow this wonderful gift of spiritual life, and on what basis or grounds does He bestow it? Let us take up the second question first. On what grounds does God give spiritual life? Can He just excuse sin and “sweep it under the rug?” The answer is that He cannot, because He is infinitely Holy and Just. His holiness mandates that He cannot have fellowship with sin. As the prophet proclaimed long ago, “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity...”^{xix[xix]} His perfect justice demands that sin be punished. God’s wrath is kindled against sin. Unless something is done for a sinner, he or she will suffer the wrath of God eternally. The way that God has revealed to us that some sinners will live with Him eternally in glorious fellowship is that their sins were assumed by a Substitute and that satisfaction to God’s justice was rendered by Him. This Substitute, of course, is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Speaking of this **Substitutionary Atonement** the great prophet said long ago in Isaiah 53:6, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” A lucid Presbyterian theologian has written, “Divine justice demands that the sinner shall be punished, either in himself, or in his substitute. We hold that Christ acted in a strictly substitutionary way for His people, that He made a full satisfaction for their sins, thus blotting out the curse from Adam and all their temporal sins...”^{xx[xx]} If Christ has died for the sins of an individual it is impossible for that person to not be saved. Christ did not die for

some nebulous entity called “sin.” He died for actual sins. This is expressed plainly in 1 Peter 2:24, “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree...”

The great Baptist preacher of the 19th century, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, made it plain that Christ **actually secured** the salvation of those for whom He died in the following words: “If Christ has died for you, you can never be lost. God will not punish twice for one thing. If God punished Christ for your sins He will not punish you. Payment God’s justice cannot twice demand; first, at the bleeding Saviour’s hand and then again at mine. How can God be just if he punished Christ, the substitute, and then man himself afterwards?”^{xxi[xxi]}

- h. h. It is now time to take up the second question; to whom does God bestow this wonderful gift of salvation? The answer is that He gives salvation to all He desires to. In the Scriptures these are called by such names as the elect, His people, the sheep, those whom He has predestinated, and many other names.^{xxii[xxii]} He never intended to save the entire human race or He would have done so! As Loraine Boettner has written: “If Christ’s death was intended to save all men, then we must say that God was either unable or unwilling to carry out His plans. But since the work of God is always efficient, those for whom atonement was made and those who are actually saved must be the same people.”^{xxiii[xxiii]} Immediately, when this truth is taught, people tend to resist it as not being fair. These objections are based on the assumption that “God owes man something and whatever He does for one He must do for another.”^{xxiv[xxiv]} What we must realize is that fallen man deserves nothing but condemnation. God saves by His grace according to the good pleasure of His sovereign will. When an individual really sees somewhat of the grossness of his sins, he will make no demands on God. He will be so thankful for salvation that he will not raise questions of supposed fairness with the Almighty. Even the pious Job, who did not understand the calamities that had befallen him, remonstrated with God for awhile. However, when he really saw the glory and majesty of God, he immediately ceased this and bowed before Him in profound reverence. He said in Job 42:5,6 “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” He also said in Job 40:4, “Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth.” It would become modern man to also lay his hand on his mouth and not charge God with unfairness. The Holy Spirit anticipated these kinds of objections and inspired Paul to answer them in Romans 9: 14-24, when Paul was teaching about the discriminating grace of God in salvation. The crux of his answer is in Romans 9:20, “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?”
- i. h. When we have really seen our sinfulness and the majesty of God, we are made to cry out like Isaac Watts did centuries ago, “Should sudden vengeance seize my breath, I must pronounce Thee just in death; and if my soul were sent to hell, Thy righteous law approves it well.”

V. V. The Sovereignty of God in **Providence**. Just about every doctrine has a practical application in daily life. This is certainly true of the Sovereignty of God. If God controlled the process of creation, and if He is absolutely supreme in salvation, does He also rule in our daily lives? Are we to be **Deists** who believe that God exists and created the world but thereafter assumed no control over it or over the lives of people? Or are we to be **theists** who believe that God is both the **creator** and the **ruler** of the universe? Well, if we are consistent Bible believers, we must be theists. We must reject all ideas such as chance, fate, fortune, and luck as unbiblical. The Bible makes it plain that God controls the events of the universe to a minute detail, yet, in such a way that He is not the author of sin. This truth is incomprehensible to human reason; it is one that must be accepted by faith in what the Scriptures say.

The definition that Noah Webster gave of “**providence**” in his 1828 edition of the *American Dictionary of the English Language* is very interesting: “In *theology*, the care and superintendence which God exercises over His creatures. He that acknowledges a creation and denies a *providence*, involves himself in a palpable contradiction; for the same power which caused a thing to exist is necessary to continue its existence.”

This truth is expressed eloquently in both the Presbyterian Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647 and in the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1688. The Baptist Confession states: “God hath decreed in Himself from all eternity by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably, all things whatsoever come to pass; yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin, nor hath fellowship with any therein; nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established, in which appears His wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing His decree.” It is readily admitted that it is impossible for the finite human mind to comprehend how all this works. How can the finite comprehend the infinite? In the words of Isaiah, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”^{xxv[xxv]}

Even though we may not be able to fully comprehend how our Sovereign God works, we must believe what the Scriptures say about His work. Just a small sampling of the Scriptures will show that this is a thoroughly Biblical doctrine, woven into the warp and woof of the word of God. Let us look at just a few of these Scriptures:

Nehemiah 9:6, “Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee.”

VI. V.

Ephesians 1:11, “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:”

Romans 11:36, “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.”

Many, many other texts could be adduced to conclusively show that God is in control of the universe that He created.

- a. a. Because we cannot fully understand the workings of God in providence does not mean that we should not believe them and draw great comfort from them. As Lasserre Bradley, Jr. has said, “Men have debated the details of this truth for centuries, but to simply embrace what is made clear in Scripture moves us to worship and adore our majestic God.”^{xxvi[xxvi]} In his dictionary, Webster wrote, “a belief in **divine providence** is a source of great consolation to good men.”

- b. b. Let us look at just a few examples of the teaching and operations of divine providence in Scripture. God rules in **government**. God not only sovereignly places people in positions of power, but He is in control of them while they occupy those positions. Wisdom Personified, Who is none other than God Himself, has said in Proverbs 8:16, “By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth.” Paul agrees emphatically with this as he states in Romans 13:1, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.” After an individual is in office, he or she is still subject to God’s rule as Solomon stated in Proverbs 21:1, “The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.”

Does this mean that we are to abandon participation in governmental affairs, because God has control over them? Absolutely not. God’s sovereignty does not absolve us of our responsibility. We are to do what God tells us to do, and then to trust matters in His hands. God has not chosen to show us everything. He has let us know what He wants us to know, and then commands us to be obedient to His plain instructions. As Moses wrote long ago, “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.”^{xxvii[xxvii]}

- c. c. God also controls our **life spans**. David made this plain in Psalm 31:15, “My times are in thy hand...” Does this mean that we are to be careless about our health and to take unnecessary risks? Absolutely not! We are not to tempt God. We are to care for our bodies, which are temples of the Holy Spirit. However, it is comforting to know that we are invulnerable until God is finished with us on this earth. This realization must have been one of the reasons Paul could have been so energetic in the spread of the gospel for so many trouble-filled years. For several decades he was constantly in danger from murderous enemies. If he had not known that God was sovereign in his life, he would probably have been paralyzed by fear.

- d. There are so many striking examples from the Scriptures of God's providential control of our lives. Moses being drawn from the Nile by Pharaoh's daughter and being reared in Pharaoh's palace is one of the greatest dramas of history. Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers, only to later save them from starvation is another astonishing example of God's control. As Joseph later told his brothers in Genesis 50:20, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."

God even used something seemingly as insignificant as a sleepless night in the life of King Ahasuerus to save the Jewish people from destruction.^{xxviii[xxviii]}

- e. There are also innumerable examples from extra-biblical history of the sovereignty of God in providence. One notable example is the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Philip II of Spain acknowledged that he could not prevail against the "winds of God." Truly, God reigns in the affairs of men. There were several times that the Spanish would probably have been successful in their invasion of England if they had but sailed. Queen Elizabeth was very negligent in preparing her fleet. On one occasion, when England lay virtually defenseless, the Armada prepared to sail. This was January 30, 1588. Elizabeth, for economic reasons, had dismantled half the fleet and sent the sailors to their homes. The only thing that prevented the Spanish fleet from sailing at this propitious time was the sudden death of her Admiral Santa Cruz.
- f. There are many instances of the obvious providence of God in the history of the United States. One of these has to do with the founding of Plymouth by the Pilgrims. They probably would have starved had it not been for the assistance of the Pawtuxet Indian, Squanto. He had been taken to England in 1605, and had remained there until 1614, when he was returned to America. Later, he was kidnapped and sold in Spain as a slave. He escaped to England and was returned to America in 1619. Even his kidnapping had been beneficial to him, as his entire tribe had been wiped out by disease in his absence. The Pilgrims landed around Cape Cod in 1620. Squanto, with his knowledge of English, prevented them from starvation by showing them how to plant corn, where to fish, and many other many other things.

The American Revolution against Great Britain would undoubtedly have been unsuccessful if it had not been for the leadership of George Washington. Prominent military historian, Warren Hassler, has said of Washington, "This masterful figure was the one indispensable man-possibly the only one who could have won the Revolution-and one of the great figures in human history."^{xxix[xxix]} It seems certain that God preserved Washington through many battles and other dangers. During the Battle at the Monongahela, in 1775, General Braddock's army was decimated. Washington was in the forefront of this battle against the French and Indians. After the battle, some of the Indians stated that they had singled him out and repeatedly shot at him. They came to believe that he was protected by an invisible power. During the course of the battle two horses were shot from under him. Four times his coat had been shot through by musket balls. Every mounted officer except Washington was either killed or wounded.^{xxx[xxx]} Washington certainly believed that his deliverance had been providential. He wrote his brother, "But, by the all-powerful dispensations of Providence, I have been protected beyond all human probability or expectation..."^{xxxi[xxxi]}

Near the very beginning of the American Revolution, the American forces were delivered from certain destruction by what many of the participants were certain was the providential hand of God. Washington's 8000 troops were trapped on Long Island by over 20,000 British troops. For some inexplicable reason General Howe delayed his attack, when victory would have been certain. Washington decided to evacuate his men to Manhattan under cover of darkness. When dawn came the Americans still needed three hours to complete the evacuation. Suddenly, a heavy fog began to rise from the ground and water. It lasted until the last boat had left the island. Then it lifted. The British began to fire, but it was too late. The diaries of many of the men who were evacuated acknowledged the unmistakable hand of Divine Providence in this deliverance.^{xxxii[xxxii]}

- VI. VI. In **conclusion**: Seeing that God is indeed sovereign in **Creation, Salvation, and Providence**, what should our response be?
- a. a. We should draw great comfort from this. God is too **wise** to make a mistake, too **powerful** to be frustrated and too **good** to do wrong! We must remember that the infinite, incomprehensible God, has never told us to understand Him, but He has instructed us to trust Him. Remembering God's greatness, we should often contemplate the words of the prophet in Isaiah 26:3, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee."
- b. b. Even more important, we should **worship, adore, and obey** Him. We should join the heavenly chorus as they proclaim **Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.**^{xxxiii[xxxiii]}

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 April, 2000

ⁱ[i] *World Magazine*, March 1, 1997, p.14

ⁱⁱ[ii] *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, p. 76.

ⁱⁱⁱ[iii] *Ibid*, p. 232.

^{iv}[iv] *Ibid*, p.250.

^v[v] *Ibid*, p.342.

^{vi}[vi] Andrew Brown, *The Darwin Wars: How Stupid Genes Became Selfish Gods* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1999).

^{vii}[vii] *Back To Genesis*, February 2000.

^{viii}[viii] *New York Review of Books*, January 9, 1996.

^{ix}[ix] Quoted in *World Magazine*, February 26, 2000, p. 32.

^x[x] Robert Shapiro, *Origins: A Skeptic's Guide to the Creation of Life on Earth*, Summit Books (1986), New York, p 130.

^{xi}[xi] Michael Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*, Simon and Schuster, (1996), p251.

^{xii}[xii] *Human Events*, March 10, 2000.

^{xiii}[xiii] Introductory Essay to 1959 Banner of Truth reprint of *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, by John Owen, p. 1.

^{xiv}[xiv] Jonah 2:9.

^{xv}[xv] Genesis 1:31.

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- xvi[xvi] Ecclesiastes 7:29.
xvii[xvii] Ephesians 2:1.
xviii[xviii] John 8:43, 47; 1 Corinthians 2:14.
xix[xix] Habakkuk 1:13.
xx[xx] Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, (1932), p. 154.
xxi[xxi] Quoted in Boettner, p. 155
xxii[xxii] Romans 8: 28-33; Matthew 1:21; John 10:11.
xxiii[xxiii] Ibid.
xxiv[xxiv] Lasserre Bradley, Jr. in *The Baptist Witness*, February 2000, p. 1.
xxv[xxv] Isaiah 55:8, 9.
xxvi[xxvi] *The Baptist Witness*, February 2000, p.2.
xxvii[xxvii] Deuteronomy 29:29.
xxviii[xxviii] Esther, Chapter 6.
xxix[xxix] Warren Hassler, *With Shield and Sword: American Military Affairs, Colonial Times to the Present*, Iowa State University Press (1982), p. 25.
xxx[xxx] David Barton, *The Bulletproof George Washington*, Wallbuilder Press, (1990), p.38.
xxxi[xxxi] Ibid., p.47.
xxxii[xxxii] Peter Marshall and David Manuel, *The Light and the Glory*, Fleming H. Revell Company, (1977), p.315.
xxxiii[xxxiii] Revelation 19:6.