

## **GOD IS AT WORK TODAY (Philemon 14-16)**

### **1.The idea explored.**

- a.Sadly, in trying to understand how God is a provider for His creation, there are two extremes to which people have gone.
- b.We'll ask and answer some questions in order to see the extremes.
- c.When God created the world, do you believe He just left it alone and showed no interest in it?
  - i.This is the idea of some, known as Deism.
  - ii.This idea believes that God created all things but simply wound it up and let it go by itself.
  - iii.It says that God neither guides the world nor intervenes in any way.
  - iv.Acts 17:27 denies this type thinking.
  - v.So does the passage we noted from Matthew 5 and all other passages like it.
- d.Does God work miraculously today?
  - i.Some say that God is active in the world, so active that it is in the form of miracles.
  - ii.No matter what it is, recovery from an illness to getting a job or finding a parking spot, it is all a miracle.
  - iii.Those that go to this extreme do not understand the purpose or place of miracles in the New Testament church.
  - iv.The miracles of God were never random.
    - (1)They were performed to make Himself known.
    - (2)They were performed to confirm God's word spoken by someone.
    - (3)Miracles were performed to bring about faith and that is not needed any longer because we have God's word (Romans 10:17).
    - (4)A miracle is a superceding of the laws of nature and God no longer does that because it is not needed.
- e.These are the two extremes to which people go: deism or miraculous.
- f.A third question that needs to be asked is: how does God work in the affairs of men today?
  - i.The only answer that is biblical is that He does so providentially.
  - ii.It is through means of natural law that God works in the affairs of men.
  - iii.God works through means instead of directly, which would be a miracle.
- g.Notice the difference between miraculous and providential:
  - i.It was a miracle that allowed Mary to become pregnant with Jesus.
  - ii.It was not a miracle that allowed Elizabeth to become pregnant with John or Hannah to become pregnant with Samuel.
  - iii.It was a miracle that God performed to deliver Israel when He had 185,000 Assyrian soldiers killed.
  - iv.It was not a miracle when Sennacharib heard rumors that caused him to return to Nineveh and then be killed by his own sons and Israel was delivered.
- h.So exploring the idea of God working today, we must understand that God works providentially in our lives, not directly, and He does work and is interested

in His creation.

## **2.Providence explained.**

- a.In order to explain providence, we have to understand the word.
- b.The English term “providence” derives from the Latin “providentia”, which signifies “foresight”.
  - i.The corresponding Greek word, pronoia, means "forethought".
  - ii.This word is found in the New Testament two times.
    - (1)Acts 24:2.
    - (2)Romans 13:14, where it is translated “provision”.
    - (3)Notice that neither of these uses has anything to do with God Himself.
- c.The concept of God’s providence concerns God’s support, care, and supervision of all creation from the moment of creation until the earth is no more.
- d.Br. Wayne Jackson wrote that providence involves at least three things:
  - i.The Creator’s maintenance of the functional balance of the natural world;
  - ii.The fulfillment of the divine purpose in the regulation of international affairs;
  - iii.God’s special operation in the lives of those who seek to do his will.
- e.When we explain providence by defining it, it is easier to understand.

## **3.Providence examined.**

- a.We mentioned in the introductory part of the sermon that God has revealed Himself with a general revelation through nature and a special revelation through His word.
- b.In similar fashion, God operates providentially in a general way and in a special way.
- c.General providence is God shining the sun on the just and the unjust and causing the rain to fall on the good as well as the wicked.
- d.Special providence is God working in the affairs of men and in the lives of men to accomplish His will.
  - i.He answers our prayers (1 Peter 3:12).
  - ii.He promises to always be with us (Hebrews 13:5).
  - iii.He provides a way of escape during times of temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13).
  - iv.He rules in the affairs of men (Daniel 4:17).
- e.You might be asking how God does all these things.
  - i.We must remember Isaiah 55:8-9.
  - ii.God’s ways are above our ways and we cannot understand all that God does or how He goes about accomplishing it.
  - iii.As Neil has often said, we either believe in prayer or we don’t.
- f.God’s providence extends to many areas of life.
  - i.The physical universe (Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:17).
  - ii.The seasons (Genesis 8:22).
  - iii.Plants and animals (Matthew 6:25ff).
  - iv.Nationally (Romans 13:1; Daniel 2:37 - God gave Nebuchadnezzar that kingdom).

g. When examined, we can see the areas in which the providence of God is at work.

#### **4. Providence exhibited.**

- a. There is no doubt that we see providence exhibited in the life of Joseph.
  - i. We begin reading the account of the life of Joseph in Genesis 37.
  - ii. Hopefully, we all know the account of his relationship with his brethren and their awful treatment of him.
  - iii. While in Egypt, despite being sold into slavery, Joseph continued to live for God by refusing to commit adultery with his owner's wife (Genesis 39).
  - iv. Despite being put in prison, he continued to be a godly example to others, and through the power of God, was able to interpret dreams.
  - v. This ability led him to be brought before Pharaoh and then put into a position of great power in Egypt.
  - vi. Being in this position led to the bringing in of his family to Egypt.
  - vii. All of these events worked out to fulfill God's plan that He had told Abraham years earlier (Genesis 15:13ff).
  - viii. Joseph, later, would understand that God had been involved in all of this (Genesis 50:20).
- b. The apostle Paul's life is another example of providence at work.
  - i. Before changing his name to Saul, Paul had received the best education a Jewish boy could have gotten.
  - ii. He was well prepared to be the apostle to the Gentiles, which no one would have ever thought possible.
  - iii. He was well prepared to become obedient to the gospel, which no one would have ever thought possible, even the apostles.
  - iv. Yet God had chosen him because God knew the kind of man He was.
- c. It surely seems that there was providence involved in the conversion of Onesimus.
  - i. He was a slave of a Christian.
  - ii. He escaped and made his way to Rome, where somehow he came into contact with Paul and was taught and obeyed the gospel.
  - iii. Notice the words of Paul that were read for us (Philemon 1:14-16 - for perhaps).
  - iv. Paul did not presume to know it was the providence of God at work, but perhaps it was.
- d. This is similar to what Mordecai told Esther (4:14 - who knows).

Some material came from an outline by Robert Alexander.