

THE WAYS OF GOD WITH MEN

INTRODUCTION:

The three points in this lesson are for the purpose of helping give us a better understanding of God's Providence and how prayers may effect that Providence in the lives of His creatures. These thoughts are just to provoke our thinking and further study. Be very PRAYERFUL as you study it and we are assured that by His Providence we'll come to understand what is necessary for us to acceptably serve Him in our lives.

I. MIRACLES:

- A. Some seem to think all supernatural, Divine activity is miraculous. Thus, conversion, rescue from peril, etc. are called "miracles!" Such is just not true!
 1. Definition of "miracle": *An effect in nature which cannot be attributed to man or to the operation of any natural law or force, which exhibnits the exertion of supernatural power and serves as a sing of such power.*
 2. Miracles seemed to proliferate in certain specific periods of biblical history.
 - a) At or about the time of the Exodus.
 - b) During the crisis at the time of Elijah and Elisha.
 - c) The period of the Babylonian exile; Daniel's time.
 - d) During the earthly ministry of Christ.
 - e) In the early church; age of the apostles.
- B. The miracles of Jesus and the apostles were intended primarily as confirmatory of His divine origin and their divine mission, and were signs of such.
 1. Miracles had the effect of making men see who Jesus was: **Jno.3:2**- *"this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."*
 - a) The miracles were performed in order to have that very effect. **Jno.5:36**- *"But the testimony which I have is greater than the testimony of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish--the very works that I do--testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me."*
 - b) The miracles were recorded so that those who had not seen them for themselves could know about them and be brought to faith by the same signs. **Jno.20:30-31**- *"Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31) **but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God;** and that believing you may have life in His name."*
 2. The same facts apply to the miracles of the apostles – signs confirming their word. **Mk.16:15-20**- *"And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. 16) "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. 17) **"These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; 18) they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."** 19) So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. 20) And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, **and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.** And they promptly reported all these instructions to Peter and his companions. And after that, Jesus Himself sent out through them from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation." **Heb.2:1-4**- *"For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. 2) For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, 3) how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? **After it was at the first spoken through the****

Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, 4) God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will."

3. Various motives are attributed to Jesus for working miracles, but in none of them is the sign or confirmation element entirely absent. Consider these thoughts:
 - a) Moved with compassion: **Matt.20:34**- "*Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.*" **Mk.1:41**- "*Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said^ to him, "I am willing; be cleansed."*
 - b) To reward faith: **Mk.10:52**- "*And Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road.*" **Mk.5:34**- "*And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction."* **Lk.17:19**- "*And He said to him, "Stand up and go; your faith has made you well."* **Lk.18:42**- "*And Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has made you well."*
 - c) To teach spiritual lessons:
 - i) At the raising of Lazarus: "*I am the resurrection and the life.*"
 - ii) After feeding the multitude: "*I am the bread of life.*"
 - iii) After healing the blind man: "*I am the light of the world.*"
- C. From the preceding it follows that when divine revelation was final and complete, and fully confirmed by recorded miracles, these signs ceased.
 1. We do not have miracles being performed today.
 2. But this certainly doesn't mean that God has ceased to deal WITH and ON BEHALF OF mankind.

II. GENERAL PROVIDENCE

- A. The word providence" is not in the Bible, but is an English word which properly describes God's oversight, control and provision for the lives and care of His human creatures.
 1. The 18th century Deists and French Rationalists believed in God only as a First Cause; that He set natural laws in motion, then withdrew from any concern and participation in the affairs of the world. Many people still hold these beliefs.
 2. The Bible shows God's concerns and provisions for the entire world, and throughout all the annals of man's history on earth.
 - a) All creation was brought about by the word of God. **Heb.11:3**- "*By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.*" **Jno.1:1-3**- "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2) He was in the beginning with God. 3) All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.*"
 - b) All things are upheld by the word of His power. **Heb.1:3**- "*And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,"* **Col.1:16-17**- "*For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17) He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."*
 - c) And finally, everything will terminate by His word. **2 Pet.3:7**- "*But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men."*

3. What we call “laws” of nature are simply descriptions of the orderly and regular manner in which God works to provide for all mankind.
 - a) “NATURAL causes” **have God working behind them!**
 - b) HE is the **Provider**: **Matt.5:45**- *"so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."* **Acts 14:15-17**- *"and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM. 16) "In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; 17) and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.""*

III. PRAYER AS GOD’S PROVISION

- A. Prayer is the means God has provided for Christians to petition Him for special invocations. **1 Pet.3:12**- *"FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS, AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER, BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL."* **1 John 5:14-15**- *"This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15) And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him."*
 1. Our relationship as children of a heavenly Father is the basis for the effectiveness of prayer.
 - a) In the sermon on the mount, TWELVE TIMES Jesus uses the term “*your Father*” in relationship to His disciples. He teaches them to pray: “*OUR FATHER...*”
 - b) God is glad to give good gifts to His children when they ask: **Matt.7:7-11**- *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8) "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9) "Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? 10) "Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? 11) "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"* **Lk.18:1-8**- *"Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, 2) saying, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. 3) "There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.' 4) "For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, 5) yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out." 6) And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said^; 7) now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? 8) "I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"*
 2. Our prayers are actually effective in bringing results: **Jas.5:16**- *"Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. **The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.**"* The word for “accomplish” is defined as “*to be mighty, powerful; to prevail.*”
- B. Objections are sometimes made to the effectiveness of prayer. These fall into two classes:
 1. It is said that if “**prayer changes things**” then God HIMSELF would be “changeable” – swayed by human behavior.
 - a) But is it not the case that God forgives in response to man’s repentance and petition? Did He not break the natural branches off the olive tree He Himself planted in order to graft in other

- branches, and is willing in response to man's faith to graft the natural branches back in? cf. **Rom.11:16-24.**
- b) So, if God responds to man's actions as this, why does it make Him a changeable God if He responds to the cries and petitions of His children?
2. It is argued that God knows what we need before we ask and without our asking, and is going to deal with the particular situation anyway – **so the asking does not change anything!**
 - a) This ignores the very nature of the father/child relationship! For example, an earthly father may know without his child asking that the child likes ice cream. The father may give ice cream to the child under three circumstances:
 - i) Sometimes he gives the ice cream on his own initiative, just because he wants to please the child.
 - ii) Sometimes he says, "If you eat all your peas and carrots I will give you some ice cream."
 - iii) Sometimes the child will come to him and ask, "Daddy, may I have an ice cream cone?" And the father buys it for him, although he would not had the child not asked.
 - b) In like manner, God gives HIS children blessings of His own initiative, without our asking. He also often blesses us when we meet the conditions of obedience. AND HE ALSO blesses us as the result of our asking in prayer.
 - C. By praying to God we are thus made conscious that He is our loving Father and we are His children! It ALSO makes us more fully aware of our utter dependence upon Him for every good gift.

CONCLUSION:

1. We cannot begin to answer all the questions that can be asked about prayer and providence. (Even our own questions!) But there are some things we must remember:
 - a) God has TOLD us **to pray**, that He **hears our prayers**, that He'll **answer our prayers**, and He urges us to have confidence in the fact that **HE CARES FOR US!**
 - b) God hasn't explained to everyone's satisfaction why our prayers are sometimes answered by granting our petitions, and they're answered sometimes with a "NO!" What's the difference? How can we know ahead of time which ones He is going to answer in the affirmative?
2. Since many things pertaining to praying seem so NEBULOUS [*indistinct, confused, dim, hazy, obscure, vague*], **what are we to do?**
3. **Matt.6:5-15-** *"When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 6) "But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. 7) "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. 8) "So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. 9) "**Pray, then, in this way:** 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 10) 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. 11) 'Give us this day our daily bread. 12) 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13) 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.' 14) "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15) "But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."*

Many of these thoughts from a lesson by Gordon Wilson.

Taught in class at Ron Stewart's @ request of Roberta Stewart