

– *Reformation Today Series* –

Does GOD Rule



Everything?

ARTHUR DENT (CA. 1553-1607)

– Reformation Today Series –

DOES GOD RULE EVERYTHING?

A Sermon of God's Providence

Arthur Dent
(unknown – 1706)

*“The lot is cast into the lap;
but the whole disposing thereof
is of the Lord.”*

Proverbs 16:33

Does God Rule Everything?

*A platform made for the proof of God's providence, that is, for
the examining of the truth of this doctrine, whether God
by His providence rule all things generally, and
every creature and action particularly.*

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Does God Rule Everything?

*“The lot is cast into the lap;
but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.”*

Proverbs 16:33

Introduction

It were to be wished that all Christians did understand that which they confess with their mouths when they rehearse the articles of their faith, gathered out of the apostles' doctrine. The confession is brief and every word in it very significant; and, well understood, it would root all heresies out of our minds.

The principles of religion are therein contained, and if he be but a weak philosopher that is ignorant in the principles of philosophy, and if it be a shame for all artificers¹ to be ignorant in the grounds of those arts they profess, it is a greater shame for us Christians to make a show of Christianity, and yet to be ignorant in the rudiments of our religion.

I would to God that everyone that hath the name of a Christian, did thoroughly understand and were fully instructed in them; then needed I not to labor so much for the proof of this doctrine. For every one of us, when we confess God to be almighty, do acknowledge that He by His providence ruleth everything.

That we may know what we say, I purpose chiefly to handle these two points: *First*, that Christ the Son of God hath the self-same providence, that God the Father hath. *Second*, that the providence of God, doth govern all things generally, and every special thing specially.

And yet in handling these two, I will not recite all that may be said touching this matter, but only touch some chief points summarily, which may help you the better to understand the large and learned tracts that many notable men have written hereof.

Christ Governs All Things as well as the Father

For the first: That Christ the Son of God doth govern all things as well as God the Father, is proved by reason, example, and authority.

¹ **artificers** – skilled craftsmen.

By Reason

If God by His wisdom made the world: that is, if that the eternal wisdom of God, which is His Word, the everlasting Son of God, was present with God, when He made the world: He is also with Him in governing the world: but He was with God when He made the world, therefore He is with Him governing of it.

The equity of the first proposition is grounded upon most strong reason. For as God created the world by His wisdom, so it is not to be believed that God governeth the world without His wisdom, otherwise He should govern by chance. The second proposition is proved by the testimony of the apostles: "By whom also He made the worlds" (Heb 1:2).

By Example

"And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near unto him. And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the firstborn. And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day" (Gen 48:13-15).

In which words Jacob acknowledgeth God's providence to stretch to particular men, even to himself. Then it followeth as verse 16: "The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." In these words the holy patriarch Jacob giveth that particular providence to the angel, which in the former verse he had given to God. And that by the name of angel we understand no creature is hereby proved, in that he affirmeth, that this Angel had power to bless; saying to him, "Bless the children." He then is the Angel who Jacob was wont to call, the angel of the Lord; that is, the Son of God. Therefore, in this place Jacob attributeth a power over all things and persons, to the Angel; that is, the Son of God, as well as to God the Father.

By Authority

"My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (Joh 5:17). This work that Christ speaketh of is not to be understood of the creation only but also of the governing of all things created. For this particule *hitherto* sheweth that He meant not only that first work of His in creating all things with His Father, but also another work, which He daily exerciseth, which cannot be understood of any other than of governing all things with His Father.

But here we must observe this rule: that the works of the Trinity are undivided. Therefore, that which is the Father's work is the work also of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. That the Son of God doeth the same works that the Father doeth, is already proved. The same is to be affirmed also of the Holy Ghost, by the warrant of God's Word, as by that ye read in Psalm 139: "Whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me" (vv. 7-10). Thus is the first point briefly proved, that Christ the Son of God, and the Holy Ghost, do govern all things as well as God the Father. Now to the second, that God by His providence governeth all and every thing.

Erroneous Philosophies

There are very many that can willingly grant, that God by His providence governeth all things in general, but that every particular thing is ruled by the same, they deny. With these men, therefore, I mind to deal somewhat large, though not so learnedly, as the cause requireth (and who is able to handle it worthily?).

Philosophers have in this point had sundry opinions: Epicurus² said, "That all things were ruled by chance and fortune, and that God lived idly, and at ease in the heavens," which opinion, as impious,³ all men in words condemn, and yet so we live that our lives are evident proofs against us, that in heart and soul we embrace it.

For surely if we thought any better of God than Epicurus did, we would not walk so directly in Epicurus' paths as we do, or live so licentiously⁴ as though God regarded us not.

The Peripatetics⁵ and other sort of philosophers broached another opinion, teaching that those things which are above the heavens, are moved, guided and governed by God Himself; but those things that are under the circle of the moon are governed partly by chance and fortune, partly by the counsels and devises of men, and partly by a brutish or senseless force of nature.

There is a third opinion of the Stoics,⁶ which is that all things are ruled by fate or destiny, that is by a secret order and link of causes; in which chain all things

² **Epicurus** – Greek philosopher, 341?-270 B.C., who held that the goal of man should be a life of calm pleasure governed by morality.

³ **impious** – lacking reverence for God.

⁴ **licentious** – disregarding accepted rules and standards.

⁵ **peripatetic** – a follower of Aristotle, taken from the Greek for "to walk about," referring to Aristotle's way of teaching as he walked about the Lyceum.

⁶ **Stoics** – a Greek school of philosophy founded by Zeno in 308 B.C., which held that all things

are so surely tied, that both God Himself and man are straightened within those bounds. This was a very dainty opinion in the judgment of the poets, who, to excuse the weakness of their god, fained that he wept because he was so hindered by the force of destiny that he could not set Sarpedon⁷ at liberty.

The fourth opinion is Plato's,⁸ who granted that God by His providence ruleth all things in general, which afterward God committed to petty gods, half-gods, and devils, who have the charge and care of particular things.

From these four opinions spring all other, whatsoever, touching God's providence; and there is no one opinion, which may not easily be reduced to one of these.

But some (even Christians) fleeing from one danger run into another; and for that they dare not deny that God by His providence ruleth all things, yet will they not grant, that by it, He governeth every particular thing, lest they should thereby be driven (as they think) to some absurdities. Thus, whilst they would avoid absurdity, they commit impiety, and fall away from the truth most dangerously. But far be this from our heart (right worshipful) and that it may never possess you. Avoid the cause that worketh it in them, which is ignorance of the Word of God; and because God in great mercy hath kindled in your heart a desire of knowledge, quench not that godly desire in you, but pursue after knowledge hotly with hearty and fervent prayer, and you shall find it. And if you shall find it, you shall certainly know, that there will no absurdity be enforced upon any doctrine grounded upon God's Word, and that you need not fear this doctrine as they do.

I will first discourse briefly of the truth of it, and will prove, that God governeth by His providence all things generally, and every particular thing particularly. Then will I answer to all those chief objections which are brought against it, and by which some vain men think to make the doctrine absurd. To the first:

God Governs All Things in General

Because this argument hath been diversely handled, and men have been very curious in discoursing thereof, and especially since no matter which way they wind themselves, many absurdities do seem to follow them. It will be best, I think, for me to keep in the high beaten way, lest seeking byways I wander out of the way. I mean to discourse so of this doctrine as I am taught in the Word of God, and then diligently to remove all those things whatsoever that be not beseeming

are governed by unvarying natural laws, and that the wise man should follow virtue alone, obtained through reason.

⁷ **Sarpedon** – in Greek mythology, a son of Zeus who was killed in the Trojan War.

⁸ **Plato** – Greek philosopher, 427-327 B.C.

the most pure nature of God, which in the judgment of man shall seem hereof to follow.

But if my ignorance were so great that I could not remove these inconveniences, yet notwithstanding are you and all Christians bound to receive with all humility this true doctrine. Blame me, not the doctrine, if I be not able to clear it of all those things which in the judgment of man may seem absurd. And although it is not my purpose to examine all that philosophers and others say against the governing of everything by the providence of God, yet in my mind all that they can say against it may by this one argument be easily overthrown. If He be a God (which they all confess, and though they would deny it, yet may it easily be proved against them), He is a most perfect thing; but that which is most perfect hath nothing more perfect than itself. Neither can we imagine anything to be more perfect, than that which of itself is truly and absolutely most perfect. Therefore, there is nothing, neither can we imagine anything to be, more perfect than God.

Hereupon I infer, if God did not govern all things in general, and everything in particular, we might well imagine that there was something more perfect than God: even such a deity which had charge and care of every particular thing. But it is showed that no such deity or Godhead can be imagined.

It is false, therefore, that they hereupon would infer that God by His providence ruleth not every particular thing. And the contrary is true, which we teach as surely: that god which they dream of to live idly and at ease, and to have no care of anything (as they babble), is not in truth a god. As Tully some time said of their master Epicurus, so say I of them, that they in words acknowledge a god but in truth deny that there is any.

But leaving philosophers, let us see what the Scriptures teacheth us. The first place I will use for the proof of this doctrine, I take out of the Epistle to the Hebrews (1:3), where it is said of the Son of God that He beareth up, that is, moveth and governeth, all things by His mighty Word. Those that granteth that He ruleth all things excepteth not one thing from His government. We may then well conclude out of this verse of God, that God governeth all, and every thing.

God Governs All Things in Particular

But lest I should leave any starting hole for the adversary to wind out at, let us further see what the Scripture teacheth us of the governing of every particular thing by God's providence. Neither will I heap up many verses, but content myself with a few examples out of which the truth of this doctrine may be gathered. And thus I do endeavor to prove it briefly.

All the creatures of God are either endued with the gift of free choice or else want⁹ this liberty of choice. They that have it are angels, both good and evil, and men also, both good and evil. They that want this liberty of choice are all other living things created by God, and also those His creatures which have no life. And yet of all these creatures, God hath a special care, so as He disposeth of every one of them according to His pleasure. The Book of Job and the Psalms do, very often, handle this argument, so that if I should gather out of them all their proofs, I should write out almost their whole books. Yet some I will bring, and leave the rest for you to gather, hoping it will be a means to bring you to the often reading of them.

In Psalm 147, the prophet saith thus of God, that He “covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains” (v. 8). But the clouds, the rain, and the grass are things without soul and life, and yet by His wonderful providence He driveth and ruleth at His pleasure the clouds in the air, He sendeth the rain down upon the earth, and He maketh the grass to grow. In Psalm 148, the prophet saith, “Fire, and hail; snow, and vapor; stormy wind fulfilling His word” (v. 8). What is it to execute the word of God, but to be ruled and governed by His word? It is to be at His beck and pleasure. Again, in Psalm 135, it is said, “Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places. He causeth the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He maketh lightnings for the rains; He bringeth the wind out of His treasures” (vv. 6-7). And Christ our Saviour, in Matthew 6, biddeth us “consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin” (v. 28); and a little afterward He telleth us that “God so clothe the grass of the field” (v. 30). These few places prove that God hath a provident care, to keep and govern even His lifeless creatures, not only generally, but also particularly: as clouds, rain, winds, grass, fire, hail, snow, vapors, lilies, and suchlike. He hath the like provident care for other of His creatures, whom He hath endued with life and sense, but not with reason and that liberty of choice, whereof I spake before.

We read in Psalm 147, that God “giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry” (v. 9). And in Psalm 104:14, the prophet saith that God “causeth the grass to grow for the cattle”; and afterward in verses 27 and 28 he saith that all beasts, fowls, and fishes, “wait all upon Thee; that Thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That Thou givest them they gather; Thou openest Thine hand, they are filled with good.” This also our Saviour Christ affirmeth in Matthew 6, saying, “Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they

⁹ **want** – lack.

reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them” (v. 26). And, in Matthew 10: “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father” (meaning God) (v. 29). By these few places you may see it sufficiently proved that God hath a provident care of every particular creature, upon whom He hath not bestowed the free liberty of choice, whether they have not life, or have life and sense and want reason.

Now, we consider those creatures to whom God hath given that gift of free choice, which I said were angels and men. Some do think that God in truth hath a special provident care over man, whom He made after His own image and likeness, but not over other creatures; which opinion how false it is you may easily gather out of that I have already written. Others do make this to be the difference between man and man, that God taketh a special care of the godly, but casteth away all care of the wicked; but the Word of God doth manifestly overthrow this opinion. In Matthew 5, Christ our Saviour teacheth us that our heavenly Father maketh the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and unjust (v. 45). And Paul, in his First Epistle to Timothy, the fourth chapter saith that, “God...is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe” (v. 10); whereof I gather that God hath a special care of those that are His, but yet not so as that He leaveth the wicked to be ruled by chance and fortune. For if God have a care of those things and creatures that the wicked possess, as of their cattle, grass, and corn and suchlike, surely He provideth also for them, the owners and masters of those creatures.

Neither can He be provident and careful for the godly, but He must also govern and rule the wicked according to the pleasure of His divine power. For as a prince and general of an army is not only careful for the troops and companies of soldiers that be in his host, but also for munitions which are vitally necessary for them, that he may have his army so furnished that it may be a terror to the enemy. He keeps them amongst whom he lieth encamped in such dutiful obedience, that they may be ready to do whatsoever his captains and officers command them. So can it not be that God doth provide for His church, but He must also moderate and govern all those things without which His church cannot be here upon the earth. Such things as appertain to the nourishing, clothing, safe and quiet harboring of the members of the church. They, therefore, who are not of the true church, are yet for the benefit of God’s church to be ruled by His providence. So are the patriarchs said to have found favor in the eyes of infidels, for that the Lord did rule and move the hearts of infidels which way it pleased Him.

Now how God ruleth not only every particular man, but also all the several actions of men, is proved by that which is in Proverbs 16: “Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established” (v. 3). And by that also which is

in James 4: “Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that” (vv. 13-15). Thus James, speaking of the actions or doings of men, affirmeth that God ruleth them all, so that without His will we can do nothing, no not so much as pass from one place to another. And Paul confesseth that he was often hindered and stayed by God, that he could not go to those churches he purposed, until he had his journey granted him by the will of God; God therefore ruleth all the several actions of all men.

I will use only two examples to illustrate and make plain this most true doctrine, that God governeth the several actions of all men, both good and bad. In the history of Joseph many things to this purpose are to be found. The end of that history was that which Joseph spake of, “Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good” (Gen. 50:20). In this history, these men and their several actions are to be weighed. First, father Jacob, then the brethren of Joseph, Joseph himself, the Ishmaelites to whom he was sold, that light housewife Potiphar’s wife, Pharaoh and his servants; the actions of all those persons are divers and very different one from another, some of them were laudable, others detestable, and yet some of those better than others, and some of those actions neither to be altogether allowed nor dispraised, and yet as Joseph witnesseth, God by His providence ruleth and disposeth them all, both men and their actions, to Joseph’s good.

So, as David saith, “He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant” (Ps. 105:17). For so God governeth the wicked actions of those men, that the most perverse practices of Joseph’s brethren, the shameless and beastly part of Potiphar’s wife, and other heavy actions, had a most happy end. So that even those things that they did to Joseph, purposing by them utterly to destroy him, brought Joseph to great honor; so mighty and wonderful is God, that He is able to make the light to shine out of darkness (2Co 4:6).

Moreover, in the last chapter of the prophecy of Jonah, we shall see how wonderfully God doth not only govern men but also all manner of creatures sensible and unsensible. For I read that Jonah went out of the city of Nineveh and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth and sat under it in the shadow till he might see what should be done to the city. And the Lord prepared a gourd, and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head and deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. But God prepared a worm when the morning began to rise the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And when the sun did arise, God prepared also a fer-

vent east wind, and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted and wished in his heart to die, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live" (4:8).

In this that I have written out of Jonah, we have these things to weigh: first, Jonah a man, the most excellent of creatures, the other baser creatures, as the gourd, the worm, and the wind. The worm is a creature that hath life in it, and is of that kind of beasts that be divided in their bodies, the head and breast from their belly and tail; the gourd and the wind they are creatures without life; and yet you see how God by His providence ruleth and moveth at His pleasure all these creatures. If Epicurus had been at this sight, he would have ascribed all to chance; if Aristotle, to natural causes; if Chrysippus or Zeno (Stoics), to fate and destiny; if Plato, to some petty god; and amongst them all there had not been one word of the truth of God.

But the Holy Ghost attributeth the course of governing all these things to God alone, who prepared them all for Jonah for his good; for by these means, Jonah that was wandering was set in the right way. And if you will read the chapter you may see more fully of that which I have already written. I may safely conclude, that both all the creatures which want the gift of choice, and all they that have it, are governed and ruled by God, by His most high and mighty providence.

Of the angels, which I placed at the first amongst these creatures, that have the liberty of choice, I will write now the less, hoping that I shall have this back again to view, polish, and enlarge. But their name teacheth us that they are ruled by God Himself, for they are called *Angeli*, angels, that is, messengers sent from God, and in the Epistle to the Hebrews are called the ministers and servants of God.

Thus for the first part that is for the truth of this doctrine: that God by His providence ruled all things in general, and every particular thing in particular.

Objections Answered

Now I come to that I promised to handle in the second place, namely to the unfolding and answering of those arguments which are made against this doctrine.

1. Too Much Toil

The first argument they make is this: God cannot govern all things generally, and every creature and action without exceeding toil and grief of mind. But it agreeth with the nature of God, that He rest in quiet, and be free from all labors. Therefore, God doth not govern all and every particular thing.

To this argument drawn thus from the nature of God, I answer that their first proposition is false, which is that God cannot govern all things generally and par-

ticularly, without exceeding toil, and grief of mind. I will not only deny it as false, but show the reasons that move me so to do.

You must know that there are divers kinds of actions: some are natural, some are violent, and some are mean¹⁰ (which are neither altogether natural nor altogether violent). Natural actions are they that do flow from the principles of nature itself, without any help elsewhere — such are the round motions of the heavens, the flowing and ebbing of the sea, that light things do of their natural lightness mount upward, heavy things all downward, that we breath and suchlike; these actions are done without any labor, because they move of themselves without any other help. Other actions there are, which are done by force and, therefore, are called violent, as by force, to make a stone mount upward, whose nature is to fall downward. And suchlike violent actions, which cannot long last as Aristotle teacheth, because they are done with force.

There is another sort of actions, which I called mean, whose beginnings are of nature, but yet they cannot be done unless they be helped by some other means, as to eat, to drink, to walk, and suchlike. But now, that which God doth, He doth without labor, because He doth it naturally, and therefore most freely; again, there is no force that can compel God, and therefore He worketh of Himself freely, and without any compulsion. Neither is He troubled with griefs, but governeth all things according to the rule of His will; neither is there anything more agreeable to the nature of God, than to govern and preserve the whole world, even with the word of His power.

2. Touching the Unclean

A second argument of theirs is this, it is an unmeet thing for God, and clean repugnant to His nature, to enter-meddle in filthy and unclean matters. They say He cannot govern every several creature, and their actions, but He must enter-meddle with many unclean and filthy matters, therefore, He doth not govern them.

I deny the second proposition, which is, that God cannot govern every several creature and their actions, but He must mingle Himself with many unclean and filthy matters; for that amongst the creatures, and their actions there are many unclean things. This consequence, though it be the ground of the proposition, is false, for although the power of God is in all His creatures, and ruleth all, yet doth it not therefore follow, that the nature of God doth enter-meddle with the unpure actions of His creatures. This may be made plain by this similitude¹¹: the sun, most excellent of all visible creatures (man only excepted), doth most set forth the

¹⁰ **mean** – common, low in quality, value, importance, or social status.

¹¹ **similitude** – a word-picture, parable, figure of speech, allegory.

glory of God; it doth shine in every place, so that it shineth often upon the dunghill, and though the beams thereof do heat the dunghill, as they do all other places, and things which they pierce. Yet for all that, the sun is not polluted with the defilements and uncleanness of it, neither doth the substance of the beams of the sun mingle itself with those things which it pierceth.

When one laid upon Diogenes¹² that he went into a brothel-house, he said in return, “Why, the sun cometh thither also, and yet is not defiled therewith.” Thereby he showed that a wise and godly man, though he enter into unclean and filthy places and come into the company of filthy persons, doth not forthwith join himself to their filthiness, neither is necessarily infected with their vices. Therefore, if this philosopher could enter into a brothel and come forth again unspotted with its uncleanness so that its filthiness could not fasten upon him, much less is God (whose nature is most pure and simple in governing of His creatures) infected with their filthiness.

3. The Problem of Evil

There is a third objection which they thus frame. Every wise and good governor, unless he be greatly hindered, bringeth his work that he frameth, and that thing that he ruleth, to a good, perfect and wished end. This may be proved by many examples, as by the example of a skillful pilot, who directeth and bringeth his ship to the purposed haven, and suchlike; but nothing can let God from perfecting His works, and yet many of His creatures, as many monsters, mad men, lame, are imperfect. Therefore, God ruleth not every generation and conception.

To unloose this knot we must remember this distinction of order: there are two sorts of orders or courses that God taketh in governing all things. The one of them we may call ordinary, which God doth often use, the other extraordinary, with which order though we be not acquainted, yet doth God Himself know the cause why He so worketh; and yet of this may we not conclude that God in His works is contrary to Himself. For if to us there appear some diversity and difference in the government of all things by God, certainly that difference is not of God’s rule, but of the unstable judgment of our troubled minds. For God’s works are not to be balanced by our judgments, which may be deceived and, for the most part, are untrue. Augustine proposed the example of two children, one of which is dutiful and loving to his father, the other is a wicked stubborn child. Both their fathers are deadly sick, the good child prayeth earnestly unto God, to deliver his father from his sickness; the graceless graft¹³ thinketh every boure

¹² **Diogenes** – Greek philosopher, 412-323 B.C., noted for his ascetic cynicism.

¹³ **graft** – one who takes advantage of his position to gain money or property.

twenty¹⁴ until his father be breathless. Both their fathers died, and that, according to God's appointment and direction.

But now, the child that prayed for the prolonging of his father's life highly pleased God; and yet it pleased not God that his father should live any longer. And again, the child that longed for his father's death, as highly displeased God, and yet it was God's pleasure that his father too should die. How cometh it to pass that that which pleaseth God may displease Him also, and that which displeaseth Him please Him; as He was pleased with the good child's kindness, but not pleased that his father should live; and again displeased with the unnatural part of the lewd child, and yet pleased with his father's death?

Surely, there is in God a certain secret ordinance which yet is just, and a certain ordinance open and manifested which also is righteous. But certain idle companions, which draw both Augustine and us into hatred for this doctrine, object against us, that they cannot perceive in God this double will, which we speak of, to wit a secret and a revealed will. For they say we all know, and you confess, that God is most plain, without all show of doubleness and, therefore, His will must be also as plain, and even so is it, though we cannot comprehend it. But let them first answer to that which Augustine calleth "God's treasures," out of which He draweth vengeance for His enemies, as arrows out of a quiver. These were the shafts He shook Pharaoh with. With these Antiochus and with these Herod were also punished; who, therefore, will account them unprofitable, or who superfluous, since the Lord Himself hath such uses to put them to?

There are also in them many profitable things for man, whereof some we know not, some the physicians know (as Nicander), and others have very learnedly written of them. Ancient learned Chrysostom¹⁵ in his tenth homily upon Genesis used this similitude: "If (saith he) in earthly matters when we see these things that be done approved by grave and mighty men, we mislike not their censure, nor gainsay it, but prefer their judgment before our own." How much more should we carry the same mind of all visible creatures, which we know that God the Creator of all things made? That since we have received His censure of them all, that all that He made was very good, let us suspend our judgments and bury them in silence, and let us not dare to prefer the judgments of all men before the Lord's. And we may persuade ourselves with strong and sufficient arguments, that the Lord made all things in great wisdom and mercy, and in a word, that the Lord made nothing unadvisedly or without cause. But though we know not the causes

¹⁴ **houre twenty** – appears to mean "great impatience."

¹⁵ **Chrysostom** – 347-407 A.D., a church father, archbishop of Constantinople.

of His works, because of the weakness of our understandings; yet hath He made all things according to His wisdom and most mighty mercy.

Thus far Chrysostom: If therefore by the testimony of Aristotle, nature made nothing in vain. As the man who was utterly ignorant of true religion, affirmed of nature, which he yet judged to be both blind and brutish, how much more are we bound to attribute unto the most wise Creator of all things this perfection in His creation, that He made nothing in vain, but all things in great wisdom? Since all His works redounded to His glory, which is the last and the chiefest end of all things, and by the common consent of all men, everything is judged either perfect or imperfect, by the attaining of His end.

4. The Problem of Injustice

There is a fourth argument, thus made against the providence of God: if God who is most wise and righteous in His judgments, do govern all things and every particular thing, there should not be so great troubles in commonwealths, and specially in the church, whereof the Lord hath a special care, for that it is His sanctuary. But both in the church and in the commonwealth there is great unquietness, so that all laws both divine and humane are openly violated; good men most cruelly are dealt withal, evil men do rejoice and triumph in their wickedness without control; God therefore governeth not all things that are in commonwealths and in the churches.

This argument thus drawn from the nature of God's justice (which seemeth to be contrary to His government by His providence, if He should see, moderate, and suffer all these outrages and disorders), is one of the chiefest props of Epicurus' opinion. This argument troubled many that now live and daily labor to bring Epicurus' name in obloquy¹⁶ with all men, and yet are content to live like epicures.¹⁷ And this argument also the Turks, and our capital enemies (the Papists¹⁸), object most against us. Sure it carrieth such weight with it, that David confesseth that he was so astounded, that his feet were almost gone; and his steps had well near slipped, when he saw the prosperity of the wicked, and punishments and hard entertainment of the godly, until he went into the sanctuary of God; then understood he their end. That is, until David entered into God's school, and learned by His Word and Holy Spirit that He ordered all things most wisely and justly. After Pompey¹⁹ had been put to the worst in the battle fought between Cae-

¹⁶ **obloquy** – disgrace.

¹⁷ **epicure** – a person who lives for sensuous pleasure.

¹⁸ **Papist** – one who believes the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church have higher authority than the Bible.

¹⁹ **Pompey** – 106-47 B.C., Roman general who conquered Palestine.

sar and him, he went to Cratippus, and disputed with the philosopher in his garden, whether he thought there was any God which by His providence ruled in earth. Earlier he had had most prosperous success in very bad quarrels, as when he had subdued and in battle vanquished the inhabitants of the East part of the world. Because he was now in a most good cause overcome, stripped of his army, and forced to fly away himself alone most shamefully, he hereof gathered that God regarded not what was done among men, but that all things were done by chance.

Thus doth the wise men of the world judge and speak of such events; but the Holy Ghost teacheth us to judge far otherwise of them. When Moses in his song was to deliver to the people the threatenings of God, if they were disobedient, which afterward the rebellious Israelites felt, he useth this preface: “His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He” (Deu 32:4); teaching hereby that whatsoever the world doth prate²⁰ of the causes of afflictions, that God with great wisdom, doth send forth of His treasures all sorts of calamities; sometime by them to punish the wicked, sometime to exercise the godly with them. For the sins of the people the hypocrite doth reign. That is, tyrants sit in the throne of justice, which under pretence of executing justice, are but hypocrites and oppress the people (Job 34:30).

“Woe to thee that spoilest,” saith the prophet Isaiah, “for thou shalt be spoiled” (Isa 33:1, cf. Ezek. 39:10). And indeed, one tyrant plagueth another, and though tyrants be a plague to all nations and kingdoms, yet are they themselves in due time in like sort punished by other tyrants. In the person of Sennacherib, the judgments of God are very lively set forth by the prophet Isaiah in the tenth chapter of his prophecy: the Lord stirreth up the king of the Assyrians to punish the eastern people. Sennacherib was a wicked man, and he is a scourge to wicked people, yea, he cruelly vexed the people of God when he spoileth almost all of Palestine and besiegeth Jerusalem the chief city of that country. And thus, saith God of him by the prophet in that place: “O Assyrian, the rod of Mine anger, and the staff in their hand is Mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of My wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so” (Isa 10:5-7), etc. And a little after, thus saith God by the prophet of him: “When the Lord hath performed His whole work upon Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent” (vv. 12-13). And a little after this thus saith the prophet, “Shall the axe boast itself

²⁰ **prate** – to talk much and foolishly, to repeat idly.

against him that heweth therewith?" (v. 15). If Pompey had looked on this example, thus laid forth by the prophet, he might have been better occupied and instructed than he was by his toying with Cratippus. And this would have taught him that, though the Lord suffereth tyrants to be for a time a plague for any nation, yet in His appointed time He suffereth them to be punished by other tyrants, and to have the same measure that they measured unto others (Gal 6:7,8).

Now if we compare Sennacherib and Pompey (who gloried in his title "The Great" which Silla gave him for his victories), we shall find many things alike in their histories. Both of them were and are in the hand of God to strike the people of the East. Both of them destroyed Palestina, and afflicted the people of God. Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem, Pompey took it, the Assyrian was put to flight by an angel and was slain in his temple, that is, in his sanctuary, by his own sons. Pompey was put to flying by Caesar, and flying to Ptolemy, king of Egypt, whose father being dispossessed of his kingdom, he had restored again to his crown, and, therefore, Ptolemy should have been as a son unto Pompey, but was instead miserably slain by him in Egypt. So unsearchable are the ways of God's judgments; for that which Micah speaketh of the Chaldeans in the fourth chapter of his prophecy: "They know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither understand they His counsel: for He shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor" (v. 12), may be spoken of all these giants and proud tyrants, who for that they know not the counsel of the Lord, shall in His appointed time bear the punishment of their pride.

Neither doth the Holy Ghost teach us that the wicked only are punished, but that the church of God is also afflicted, though for another end and purpose. And there may many reasons be brought to show why the church of God is subject to so many calamities, but I will at this time allege only three, by which as by many others we may know that the Lord, in truth and judgment, doth exercise His church with afflictions.

The first is, that so long as we carry about with us this burden of corruption, we are not only subject to sin, but do by sinning continually provoke the Lord to deal in justice with us. And, therefore, it is agreeable to the justice of God, that we be chastened of the Lord with a fatherly rod, which may keep us in obedience. Yea, we must all say with Jeremiah, in the third chapter of his Lamentations: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not" (v. 22).

My second reason is this: It is best for us to be humbled under the mighty hand of God; for we know how fierce and haughty minded we are by nature, so that it is necessary for us that God keep us under His schooling, and so have us in some

awe. Therefore, David saith, in Psalm 119:67: “Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept Thy word”; and in verse 71: “It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes.”

The third reason is delivered by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:32: “When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.” Therefore, let us conclude this whole discourse with David thus: “The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous” (Psa 19:9), neither let us measure them according to our own conceit and judgments, which are very capable of being deceived (Jer 17:9). But let us know that the godly are punished for their sins they daily commit, that they may be humbled, and that they perish not with the wicked. But God, in punishing the wicked, doth show and open the treasures of His long-sufferance, patience and justice; but when He afflicteth us, He maketh us like to His own Son Christ, and stirreth up in us an earnest desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ.

Let us in the meantime give ourselves to hearty and earnest prayers, praying continually with the saints of God. Come Lord Jesus, yea, come quickly! Amen. Amen.



About the *Reformation Today Series*

The *Reformation Today Series* considers modern ideas carefully in the light of Holy Scripture. Sometimes articles in the series will be by a contemporary author examining a current trend according to Scripture. Other articles will be by authors from prior centuries, whose articles may not specifically name a modern issue *per se*, but will set forth Scriptural truth addressing the issue.

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Reisinger, J.
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Sovereignty of God in Providence
No Compromise
Pathway to Christian Marriage

open theism
pragmatism
dating

Does God Rule Everything? explains that God rules all things generally, and every creature and action particularly. It suitably answers the misguided thinking that God does not know all things! By presenting the God revealed in Holy Scripture, the author upholds the historic faith of the Reformation.

Arthur Dent (ca. 1553-1607), an ardent Puritan and author of the Elizabethan bestseller, *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven*, was born in Melton, Leicestershire, about 1553. *The Plain Man's Pathway* was a major influence on John Bunyan during his long struggle to conversion. Dent became a learned and pious minister in South Shooberry, Essex, England. In 1583, Dent published his *Sermon of Repentance*, which immediately became very popular. He was persecuted by Bishop Aylmer for non-conformity to the Church of England's hierarchy and to its traditions of men in worship. Moreover, in 1584, Dent endured many troubles from this prelate for refusing to wear the surplice (a loose white outer vestment worn by the clergy) and for omitting the sign of the cross in baptism. These were matters concerning which the Puritans made a protest at the Hampton Court Conference.