

XXXVII. Timeless Truth for Timely Topics in Biblical Perspective

*What Does the Bible Say?*

“Developing the Christian Mind, Part 7—Providence”

Romans 8:28–30

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

April 3, 2016 – Evening sermon

We are in part 7 of developing the Christian mind and dealing with the fourth element of Divine Providence from Romans 8:28–30 and I’ll also cover this text in the next study on Sunday morning. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away and my heart will choose to say whatever my God ordains is right. When He gives I’ll turn the blessings back to Him and when He takes away I will bless Him. This doctrine deserves an entire series but I’ll try to give its essence and how it assists us in developing a Christian mind.

Romans 8:28–30 says [28] *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. [29] For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. [30] And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

I had been called to a church that had well over a thousand members but was down to about fifty people. This church is Pinelands and there weren’t any children until I showed up with my three. After one good flu season I would be out of a congregation and it was a challenging situation that we were facing. I was so challenged by the Lord I would think “What do I do here?” The first Sunday I was there I went to the back to shake hands with people and there was no one’s hand to shake. These people were old but they were quick when it came to leaving. I was literally chasing people down in the parking lot just to shake hands with them. Then I turn around to go back in at 12:05 and the door was already locked. Here I am the pastor and had to break into the church to get my keys to get home that day.

We were certainly in a new place and the next Sunday I shared the Gospel from II Timothy 1:12 which says [12] *But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.* These were kind of Paul’s last words before he gives his life over to martyrdom there in Rome. As I got to the end, the organist, with no invitation stood down there to give her life to Christ. I went to the back and the chairman of the deacons was there, so red faced and he said “Harry, what were you doing down there?” This man looked mad and I said “Jack, Roxanne wanted to give her life to Christ so I was praying with her and my wife is with her now.” He said “I thought that is what you were doing. I need to do that.” It wasn’t exactly a broken spirit and contrite heart I was looking at and I said “You can do that.” He said “Can I wait till next Sunday and come down front to do that too?” I said “Sure Jack but you don’t need to do that because you can do it right now.” He said “I knew you would tell me that but I want to go up front. I’ve been the chairman of the deacons for 14 years and I’m just a hypocrite.” I said “Jack, let’s pray together and I’ll let you come up front and share that next Lord’s Day.”

I went home and told my wife that this was encouraging and she agreed. Then I get a phone call on Thursday and Jack had cut his thumb off with a power saw. This was back in the early 1980s so I went to the hospital to see him and he was literally the second person they had used this new practice of medicine on. I told him if it doesn’t take we’ll come on down. I went up to him and said “Jack I want to tell you two things. One is that you’re a believer and Jesus

Christ has your life now. The second thing is that because of that Satan is going to attack you. He doesn't know who is a believer but Satan is God's Satan and therefore he can't do anything that God is not allowing him to do. This is not only your opportunity to own Christ in the midst of adversity but God says this thing that is not a good thing is a part of what He is doing in your life." I quoted for him Romans 8:28.

Then I said "Jack a week ago you didn't have this promise in Romans 8:28 for this promise is only for those who love God. Not all things are good but all things work together for good. So God is going to use this bad thing for a good purpose and that's what you need to trust." We prayed together and the next Sunday he comes forward with his hand in the splint and I said "Jack I didn't think you'd be here today" and he said "Harry, Satan could have taken my arm off at the shoulder and I still would have been here today. I want to own Christ." Then out of the 55 people who were there in attendance, 28 stood and came to give their life to Christ. That day Pinelands was given a glorious revival that began and I had the privilege to participate in for three years. I would still be there if Dr. Barker and Terry Geiger hadn't gotten to me and said "We want you to go plant a church in Charlotte, North Carolina." I did say no a few times but I prayed about it and then I was gone.

It was a wonderful place to be in ministry. I was able to see the doctrine of Divine Providence at work. Jack became a stalwart elder in that church and God used that in his life. God used his choice to say 'whatever my God ordains is right' and the tapestry of God's Providence produced through that event bringing a church back to life for Jesus Christ. The doctrine of Divine Providence is something that steals and soothes the soul and the heart. The doctrine of Divine Providence keeps us from being carried away with ourselves in the day of blessing and it keeps us from dying in a pile in the day of adversity in a pile of self-pity. It is a glorious doctrine when we see our God at work and it is a crucial doctrine in developing a world and life view.

The premise is to live a faithful and effective Christian lifestyle, a Christian must develop a Christ-centered, Bible-framed, Spirit-filled life view propelled by a Christ-consumed life love saturated by persistent prayer. In other words, your life love gives you a hunger for a Christian mind so you can get a life view and that is what leads you to an effective and faithful life style all saturated with persistent, intercessory prayer.

We want to get this life view which is designed to answer the four framing questions that everyone is asking. Everybody you meet has some philosophy or religion that is designed to answer these four questions. One is why is there something rather than nothing? There is clearly something here. Two, why are some things right and some things wrong? Three, what things are right and what things are wrong? Four, who or what determines the things that are right and the things that are wrong? When those four framing questions are addressed, now we're ready to answer four very relevant and personal questions. One is who am I? Two where did I come from? Three why am I here? Four where am I going?

In the previous six studies I tried to share that basically there are two world views and these views are multiple and multi-faceted. Some in that category are scientism, consumerism, materialism, positivism, humanism, sensual-ism and we could go on and on with the -isms that people grab hold of to answer those four framing questions in order to answer the four very personal questions but basically they fall into two categories. You either have an increasingly accurate world and life view built upon a sovereign God or you have a world and life view built upon the illusion of the sovereign self.

Jesus said to Peter, “You’ve set your mind on man’s interests and not upon God’s interest.” To have a mind set upon God’s interest, the sovereign God of glory, is our effort, so how do we get there? If you’re not there then you’ll report to the sovereign self and the sovereign self will determine what marriage is, sex is, family is and what your identity is in. In other words, there is always an effort to declare one’s significance in life from the sovereign self where I will determine who I am. Whenever you embrace the sovereign self and your identity is wrapped up in what you say you are instead of who God made you to be, you become easy prey for the politician and the corporate executives of this world. They can manipulate you wherever they want you to go and that’s why we have a theme out there called identity politics. It is there for people who think they can sovereignly declare their own identity. So we say ‘no’ to that.

Who am I? I am the one God made me, saved me and sustained me to be. Where did I come from? Did I just come from the trinity of space, time and matter? Why am I here? Am I here for the sovereign purpose of declaring my own self existence or am I here for a purpose, made with a purpose, designed on purpose, designed with purpose? Where am I going? When I take my last breath am I nothing but dust and worm food or is there something that we’re headed to? So those are the personal questions that the framing questions allow us to answer from whether we’re going after the world view of the sovereign self or the sovereign God.

If it is the sovereign God then there are five elements that we appeal to, to develop the Christian mind. The first and most essential of all of them to begin with is creation. If you want the right view of man and God then you start with the doctrine of creation. Then you move to wondering why everything isn’t the way God created it when God said it was good and that’s because of our sin. It is due to the fall of Adam and our sin with the result of total depravity as our sin nature permeates and pollutes everything in our life and renders us spiritually dead even though we’re spiritually living.

Recently someone handed me something from another preacher where he preached on the resurrection and called it the walking dead from our zombie fascination in our day and time. People think this is ingenious but it’s dead wrong. Jesus wasn’t resurrected as the walking dead but you and I are born as the walking dead. There is where your application is. We are born walking but we’re dead in our sins and we need Someone to bring us from death unto life. The doctrine of the fall informs us of how the extent of that fall, sin nature in our life and that sin record where we bear guilt and shame.

Then there is glorious news that God has an answer which lead to the third element and that is redemption. Then the fourth element is providence which we will focus in on in this study and the fifth element we’ll finish on after this is the doctrine of consummation which deals with where everything is headed but in redemption we learned that no one is so lost that they cannot be saved and that is part of our Christian world and life view. Then we learned that no one saved can then be lost and that no one who is saved will not be changed experientially. In other words, if you’re changed internally it will show up externally in your life. There will always be fruit because there is a root. The fourth thing we learned about redemption is no one who is saved who cannot be used by God to seek and to save others who are lost. Fifthly no one who is saved will not impact others but will impact their environment, their culture and where they live.

So now let’s look at this matter of God’s providence. God sovereignly rules and overrules by His grace from the heavens over all of creation to assure that all things will ultimately work together for His glory and the well-being of His people. What about sin? Absolutely. What about the devil? Absolutely. When he gets thrown into the lake of fire you’ll be seen written on his heels ‘to God be the glory great things He has done.’ What about the

judgment of the lost? It will be for His glory. The glory and the testimony of God's full and majestic attributes will be seen in all things. God is causing all things to work together for His glory. He is working things together in the salvation of the lost, in the condemnation of those who stand in rebellion against Him and for the well-being of His people.

So clearly what we have here in our world and life view is the sovereignty of God and the moral agency of man. Theology stands out there that they will just preach the sovereignty of God but they will not preach the moral agency of man. In other words, man is just kind of a puppet where God is sovereignly determining what he does instead of the doctrine of the sovereignty of God, election and predestination but what you have is a Greek philosophy of fatalism. God's doctrine of His sovereignty is not that He turns people into puppets but He enlivens them, engages them, works in their intellect and emotions and He works so that in the day of His great power we will voluntarily and freely come to Him. Then He upholds us by the Word of His power so that God is at work in this world in hardening the hearts of the hard hearts and in setting the hearts of His people free that they might know Him. He works through all, even His enemies. He holds with laughter from the heavens, for who can stop the hand of the Lord. There are many times in the Bible where God's people can see this and I'd like to show you one place.

Let's look at Genesis 50 where we'll take a look at this doctrine of Divine providence, the reality of life and a believer choosing to rest in the contentment of God in the adversity of life and realize the purposes of God so that he didn't fall prey to bitterness and the anger of man. This is Joseph. Joseph was sold into slavery at a young age all because of the jealousy of his brothers. Then Joseph eventually rises up into the court of Pharaoh and because of the famine sent by the Lord his brothers are brought down to Egypt where Joseph will take care of them and where this nation will be developed that will then be set free 400 plus years later. Once their father dies, the brothers realize they will be in trouble because they know what they did. Their guilt was overwhelming them and the fear that comes with that guilt.

Genesis 50:15–21 says [15] *When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him."* [16] *So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: [17] 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you."' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father."* Joseph wept when they spoke to him. [18] *His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants."* [19] *But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? [20] As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. [21] So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones."* Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Joseph doesn't say to his brothers "Don't worry you all were just puppets in the hands of a sovereign God." His brothers didn't just go sell Joseph into slavery not knowing what there were doing as if they were robots. No, Joseph says to them that they meant it for evil and they were exercising a moral agency. That is why there is judgment seat because we really do what we do. You don't put robots in front of judgment seats and we're not sovereign. We're not in the place of God. There is a God who rules and overrules in the affairs of men. So what they meant for evil a sovereign God meant for good to bring about this occasion in Scripture and therefore Joseph didn't need to get revenge or take out spite on his brothers. On the contrary, Joseph provides for his brothers. Joseph recognizes that is why God saved him.

What if Joseph's brothers had been wrapped up in bitterness and Joseph decided to put them all to death for what they had done to him? You and I would have been in trouble because one of those brothers was named Judah and from the line of Judah would come the Redeemer. So now Joseph's free moral agency, functioning in the hand of a sovereign God, preserves the line of our Redeemer. Why does Joseph do that? It is because he has a God-centered world and life view and not a Joseph centered world and life view. He is able to put his trust in God that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose. So he brings to bear in his life style from his life view the doctrine of Divine providence with a sovereign God who cannot be stopped, who works through the actions of men, above the actions of men, in spite of the actions of men and will accomplish His purposes for His glory and the well-being of His people. That is why Joseph is able to choose to say from his heart 'whatever my God ordains is right.'

This matter of the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man is continually in the Bible. We call it an antinomy. Either God is sovereign and I'm a robot or if I'm a free moral agent then God can't do anything unless I allow Him to do it. We say 'no' to the Armenian theology in which God stands at the beck and call of humanity if we let Him do something. We say 'no' to a hyper-Calvinism that is fatalism in reality that basically says the actions of men are nothing more than the reflection of God who is pulling the strings in our life and that what we do is not meaningful, actual or what we are really doing. No, we have a sovereign God and a free moral agency.

Notice I have not said a free will because our will is in the bondage of sin until God sets us free but we're actually making decisions in life and God works through, above and in the midst of that decision making. The Bible just puts it together in various ways. For instance, when Jesus told Peter he had a man-centered view of life instead of a God-centered view, how did that passage start off? It started off with Jesus saying "who do people say that I am?" and Peter answers "You're the Christ, the Son of the living God." Then Jesus says to Peter, "Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jona for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you but My Father who is in heaven." A sovereign God has opened your mind to know who I am. Peter confessed Him and he couldn't confess Him unless the Father by the Spirit did not open his mind.

Then Peter goes on to produce a malevolent statement saying "God forbid that You should go and die on the cross." How does Jesus deal with him? Jesus makes a statement showing that Peter is responsible for what he said. In Matthew 16:23 Jesus says [23] *But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."* He basically tells Peter he is working against the living God. Will that stop the living God who is sovereign in His providence? No! but Peter was working against him. In other words, he was really doing something.

I'd like to look at one other text in Acts 13. Here we can see the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. This requires so much more attention than I can give right now but at least I can get you thinking about it. I would like to recommend a wonderful book to you titled Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God by J.I. Packer in which he deals with this seeming antinomy. These are not contradictory truths. They are seemingly contradictory because we don't have the ability to resolve them with our little brains but they are perfectly compatible in the hands of a sovereign, supra-rational, supra-logical, supernatural God who brings them into existence. I want to show you this in Acts 13. Here Paul is out preaching the Gospel going to the Gentiles and Jews. This is what it says when he goes to the Gentiles.

Acts 13:48 says [48] *And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.* Who believed here? It was those who were appointed. Who did the appointing? It is God. This is a sovereign God saving His people. What does Paul do? Paul is praying, preaching and sharing because the same God who ordained the end has also ordained the means. Paul's job is not the end but Paul's job is the means and man proposes but God disposes. A man plans his way but God directs his steps. Here the Lord brought the blessing of the harvest.

Notice the Gentiles. They are not surprised at what they are doing. They are really, emotionally, rationally and volitionally putting their trust in Christ. You get to see what is happening behind the scenes with not only moral agency working in obedience to God's Word but a sovereign God enabling Paul to preach and the Gentiles to believe and God's sovereign purposes are being accomplished. The Bible is full of the hand of the sovereign God at work and nowhere is it more evident than in the doctrine of Divine providence. What you meant for evil God meant for good to bring about this present statement.

The doctrine of Divine providence in life is not always seen. God is ruling and overruling in the affairs of men and we see situations that have dark roads but I'll choose to say... Or we see something and think how can God be at work here but we know He is and we put our trust in Him so here is the way I try to describe this doctrine of Divine providence.

When I was in seminary my dear wife would have to listen to all of my burgeoning, new sermons and if you think you have something to work through now you ought to see what she had to work through back then. She took up needle pointing and explained to me that it helped her listen to me. I think it just helped her to do something worthwhile while I was preaching and when she was through she would come show it to me. Many times she would hand it to me with the back side showing where you could tell there was some kind of pattern but basically what was seen were all these threads knotted up together. Then when I would turn it over you'd see this clear picture.

On this side of eternity, we are living looking at the backside of Divine providence. Every once in a while on this side of eternity God will flip it around and let you see what He is doing but most of the time we're looking at the back. It seems to be all these tangled threads and we are saying 'what in the world is happening here?' You see that there is something going on here but we don't know what God is doing. It is absolutely amazing what He is doing. Tolkien called these things eu-catastrophes. We are in a broken, fallen world and we see all these sin-based catastrophes but He says what is really happening for God's people and for God's glory is that eu-catastrophe. Tolkien is taking the Greek prefix -eu which means 'good' and they are really good catastrophes in the hand of God for His glory and for the well-being of His people.

I was converted in a funeral as I saw a man deal with the death of his 39 year old wife with four daughters. He told me he would not bring her back because he would be that selfish to bring her back because of all that she has now. Then he told me that God was sovereign and this isn't a good thing but that God had a good purpose in it and He is working all things together for His good. Little did he know one of those things was my conversion. Then when I left Miami to go to Charlotte to plant a church and I gave my testimony in much more detail, there was a young lady hiding in the congregation who wouldn't let me see her so I made a beeline for her after the service and it was one of the four daughters. She said to me "I have been angry with God for 14 years but I have always told Him if He could just show me one good thing He did in taking my mother home and not allowing me to have her then I would come back to Him. Today I heard more than one thing." We went from 38 people to 39 that night.

That is what God is doing. Seeing things that are seemingly catastrophes are actually eu-catastrophes and they govern the way that you then respond to life. They bring contentment in the moment of seemingly disappointment because you know that God is at work and you know there is a sovereign God. There is contentment and courage. We don't live in despair. We don't give up because we know our God is working even through the bleakest moment, we trace the rainbow through the rain.

Recently I stood with a group of people in a little bedroom at a place called Guiney's Station where the most famous man in the world at that time had died. Before the outbreak of the Civil War he was a professor. He had a reputation because he was breveted for bravery in the Mexican War and because he had begun a school in opposition to the law of Virginia for slaves to educate them in 1857 and put it in a church so the state wouldn't stop him. He called it Sunday school and his name was Thomas Jackson who became known as the famous Stonewall Jackson. At the height of his career was at a place called Chancellorsville where he and Lee outnumbered three to one, divided their army four parts and won this unbelievable victory. As they were following up on it friendly fire rang out and Jackson went down wounded. He had his arm amputated and even though he was recovering from that pneumonia began to take over.

One week later, on Sunday May 10, 1863 his dear wife comes in and says "Thomas, what if I were to tell you it is God's will for you to die today?" He said "If it is God's will for me to die today then I prefer to die today and I shall be the infinite gainer to be translated into His presence." He was only 39 years old, at the height of his career, shot by his own men but he had no despair or cynicism. Then Jackson says to his wife, "Mary Anna, do not weep. Have I not always asked the Lord that I could meet Him on the Sabbath? Today is the Lord's Day. Is He not kind to us in His providence?" There with his wife and five month old baby and at the height of his career, he is resting in the hand of providence.

I also took this group of people to a place called Fredericksburg where right before the Battle of Fredericksburg General Robert E. Lee is in his tent and they come him with messages. He handles them and his adjutant Walter Taylor walks out of the tent but then turns to come back into the tent only to find Lee on his knees weeping uncontrollably. Taylor never noticed it and Lee with his self-control, one of the telegrams contained a message that his daughter Annie, who was preparing to be a missionary, had just died of typhoid fever. He handed it to Walter Taylor who then read it. He is in battle so he can't go to the funeral so he writes to his wife saying; "Mary Anna, I have often prayed that this cruel war would be over and our family circle would be joined unbroken but God in His providence has decreed otherwise. Would you join me in giving praise to our God for of our seven children He has taken the one we know was ready to meet Him? Now let us lead our family that the circle will be unbroken in His presence."

I took one group of people to a statute in a place called Rives Salient and there stood a Bible teacher who had become a General in the Civil War from Maine and went to college whose name was Joshua Chamberlain. He knew nine languages and had been wounded six times. He would get the Congressional Medal of Honor. Clearly the most grievous of all of his wounds was that day when Ulysses S. Grant said to Governor Warren, 'direct Chamberlain to take that Salient.' Chamberlain looked at him and sent back a message that said 'there are no men that can take that Salient' and Grant says 'I want the war over, take the charge and do it today.' He put his men in position and led them out and the first wave of Confederate soldiers just went through his men. The colors went down and he picked them up himself. He held them up and said "Men, to the top, follow me." A 58 caliber bullet went through his left hip to his right hip and just tore up all of his insides but he refused to leave the battle.

He handed the flag off and stuck his sword in the ground. Finally with the blood pouring out he went to his knees and said “Men, go to the top and give them the cold steel.” Then came darkness as he fainted with the loss of blood. The artillery sent out people to rescue him to bring him back but as this was happening he said “don’t bring me back for this wound is mortal so go save someone else.’ They said ‘we’re under orders to bring you back.’ He was brought back and his own surgeon Dr. Abner Shaw came from the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine and began to operate on him all night long. He actually woke up twice during the surgery and said ‘continue on.’ They closed him up and explained to him that he was about to die. In God’s providence he didn’t but he thought he was going to die so he reached for a piece of paper and this is what he wrote to his wife; “Dear Francis, I am not of Virginia but Virginia is of me. My blood stains are soil. Would you join me in giving praise to God that perhaps with this sacrifice men shall be set free but I want you to know that I die in perfect peace in the hands of providence because the blood that stained Calvary has set me free. O how blessed it is to die knowing your sins are forgiven.”

I just gave you three stories that I could multiply in church and military history of believers, where the world and life view buttressed with the doctrine of Divine providence caused them not to descend into self-pity or cynicism but you see the contentment. Chamberlain could have brought a lawsuit against Grant because he told him not to do what it. What ere my God ordains is right and they put their trust in Him. That doesn’t mean careless living but it means a living in Christ that is care less because God is ruling and overruling for His own purposes and what the world would say is tragedy, we know as triumph. How do we know? The greatest catastrophe in all of history was when men and women laid their hands on Christ and crucified Him. What a eu-catastrophe! It is at that cross that we are saved.

Our God is not the victim of man’s sins or Satan’s. Now you just have a world view that liberates you from good God, bad god. There is only one God and Satan himself is God’s Satan. The same God who authors no sin, orders and rules in the midst of sin to accomplish His own purposes. Our God is glorious and sovereign therefore everything will be ultimately to His glory and all things will work together for our good. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word trying to understand this glorious, marvelous, unfathomable truth that a sovereign God is working in the midst of men and women. You not only work through our obedience but You can even rule and overrule in our disobedience. You can not only work through Your people but You can work through those who are not Your people that the heart of the king is in Your hands and You direct it where so ever You will even as You direct the rivers to the seas. So God give us that life of contentment in You, courage because You’re doing something glorious and a glorious vision of triumph for our God overcomes and we are overcomers in Him for I pray in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

### Power Point

To live a faithful and effective Christian LifeStyle, a Christian must develop a Christ-centered, Bible-framed, Spirit-filled LifeView propelled by a Christ-consumed LifeLove saturated by persistent prayer.

LifeLove – LifeView – LifeStyle

## FOUR FRAMING QUESTIONS

- I. Why is there something rather than nothing?
- II. Why are some things right & others wrong?
- III. What things are right & what are wrong?
- IV. Who or What determines the things that are right and the things that are wrong?

## FOUR PERSONAL QUESTIONS

- I. Who am I?
- II. Where did I come from?
- III. Why am I here?
- IV. Where am I going?

## THE ESSENTIAL FRAMEWORK OF A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

### CREATION – FALL-REDEMPTION –PROVIDENCE – CONSUMATION

#### REDEMPTION

1. No one so lost they cannot be saved.
2. No one saved that can be lost.
3. No one saved actually who are not changed experientially.
4. No one saved who cannot be used to save others.
5. No one saved that will not impact others and their cultural environment.

#### PROVIDENCE

God sovereignly rules and overrules by His grace from the Heavens over all of Creation to assure that all things will ultimately work together for His glory and the well-being of His people.