

The Providence of God (11) **God's Providential Dealings with the Non-Elect**

Let us turn to 2 Peter 2 in which we read of the presence of false teachers in the churches of Jesus Christ. Here Peter describes God's ability and purpose to deliver His people through trials and temptations while at the same time He is able and has purposed to reserve the unjust, those who are not among His elect, unto their final condemnation on the Day of Judgment.

⁴For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; ⁵and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; ⁶ and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; ⁷and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked ⁸(for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)-- ⁹***then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,*** ¹⁰***and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority.*** (2 Pet. 2:4-10)

Today is the last, the eleventh, Lord's Day on which we will have addressed the subject of God's providence. We have considered our subject according to this definition: "God's works of providence are his most holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures, and all their actions."

Providence speaks to the nature and manner of God's active involvement in His world. God preserves all that exist. He governs all that exists according to and for the purpose of achieving His will that He has purposed for His creation; thus providence is the unfolding of God working out His eternal decree. God is managing all events according to His plan and purpose that He had determined He would perform in history, a plan and purpose He established in eternity, prior to creation. In eternity past God determined in an instant every event from the greatest to the most minor of details that transpires in history. An infinite God can do this. This includes God ordering of every thought that courses through your consciousness, every event that transpires in His world, including the election of every man and woman that God has decreed from eternity to save through Jesus Christ, including the passing over of all others, leaving them unto their just condemnation. The biblical doctrine of God's providence declares that God is working in history to accomplish everything that transpires according to His decree made in eternity. This is what God's Word teaches us about God's providence, His sovereign control over His creation.

Now we have examined this subject of God's providence from a number of different vantage points. Most recently, on the last two Sundays, we examined the manner in which God manifests special acts of His providence toward His elect, those whom He set apart in eternity that He purposed He would save from their sins unto Himself through Jesus Christ. Throughout the lives of His chosen people there is a special providence of God protecting and preserving us. Before we came to faith in Jesus Christ, God preserved us from anything that that would have rendered our eventual coming to faith not possible. He has even commissioned special guardian angels to preserve His people (cf. Heb. 1:14). And after we come to salvation through Jesus Christ, our Lord continues to preserve His people unto their final and full salvation. Peter expressed one aspect of God's providence toward His elect. He wrote, "***The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations.***" If this were not so, we would not be able to stand.

Here is a good description of God's acts of providence toward His people:

The providence of God is the great barrier and hinderance to a world of sin, which otherwise would break forth like an overflowing flood from our corrupt natures. It prevents abundance of sin, which otherwise wicked men would commit (Gen. 19:11)...

And so much corruption there remains in good men that they would certainly plunge themselves under much more guilt than they do if Providence did not take greater care of them than they do of themselves. For though they make conscience of keeping themselves, and daily watch their hearts and ways, yet such is the deceitfulness of sin that if Providence did not lay blocks in their way, it would, more frequently than it does, entangle and defile them.¹

This was written by **John Flavel**, in his classic book, *The Mystery of God's Providence*. Flavel went on to describe more specifically the ways in which God preserves His people through His providence:

- Sometimes by stirring up others to interpose with seasonable counsels, which effectually dissuade them from prosecuting an evil design.
- Sometimes by hindering the means and instruments, whereby the evil is prevented.
- Sometimes by laying some strong affliction upon the body to prevent a worse evil.
- Sometimes sin is prevented in the saints by the better information of their minds at the sacred oracles of God (i.e. the Holy Bible).
- Sometimes the providence of God prevents the sins of His people by removing them out of the way of temptations by their death.

Flavel then sought to generate gratefulness on the part of his Christian readers for God's kind acts of providence toward them:

How woeful your case had been if the Lord had not mercifully saved you from many thousand temptations that have assaulted you! I tell you, you cannot estimate the mercies you possess by means of such providences. Are your names sweet, and your consciences peaceful, two mercies as dear to you as your two eyes? Why surely you owe them, if not wholly yet in great measure, to the aids and assistances of providence given you all along the way you have passed through the dangerous tempting world to this day.²

But what of God's providential acts involving the non-elect, all those whom God determined that He would not actively work to save from their sins, but rather that He would leave them in their sin unto their final and just condemnation? God's providence governs their lives also. Peter wrote of God's sovereign and providential dealings with false teachers, clearly ones who are not among God's elect, but rather who live and die in their sins. He wrote, "*The Lord knows how... to reserve the unjust under punishment for the Day of Judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority*" (2 Pet. 2:9-10).

Now let us say a word about these ones whom we have described as non-elect. When this subject is brought up, it commonly results in people reacting negatively, sometimes rather vehemently. **Charles Spurgeon** had written of this natural hostility to the sovereignty of God in the dispensing of His salvation to the ones He has freely chosen:

There is no doctrine more hated by worldings, no truth of which they have made such a football, as the great, stupendous, but yet most certain doctrine of the Sovereignty of the infinite Jehovah... When God ascends His throne, His creatures then gnash their teeth, and we proclaim an *enthroned* God, and His right to do as He wills with His own, to dispose of His creatures as *He* thinks well, without consulting them in the matter; then it is that we are hissed and execrated, and then it is that men turn a deaf ear to us,

¹ John Flavel, *The Mystery of Providence* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998 [orig. 1678]), pp. 90f.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 91-93.

for God on His throne is not the God they love. But it is God upon the throne that we love to preach. It is God upon His throne whom we trust.

Now there have been those in the past who have used terms like *double predestination*. In other words, they spoke of God in His sovereignty actively choosing, or electing, who would be saved and also actively choosing, or electing, who would be damned. We do not use such language because it is not explicitly taught in the Scriptures. But non-reformed people will often assume and accuse that all who hold to reformed theology believe and teach double predestination. But this is not a just charge. Although all reformed people understand the Bible to teach that God has decreed all that comes to pass in history, most reformed make a distinction between God actively choosing (electing) whom will be saved, but passively allowing the non-elect to their just condemnation. Our Confession of Faith states the matter carefully. It is addressed under the subject "Of God's Decree." I have set before us the entire article that touches on this matter.

Chapter 3: Of God's Decree³

1. God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin nor hath fellowship with any therein; nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established; in which appears his wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing his decree.⁴

2. Although God knoweth whatsoever may or can come to pass, upon all supposed conditions, yet hath he not decreed anything, because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions.⁵

3. *By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated, or foreordained to eternal life through Jesus Christ, to the praise of his glorious grace; others being left to act in their sin to their just condemnation, to the praise of his glorious justice.*⁶

4. These angels and men thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.⁷

5. Those of mankind that are predestinated to life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love, without any other thing in the creature as a condition or cause moving him thereunto.⁸

6. As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so he hath, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, foreordained all the means thereunto; wherefore they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ, by his Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation; neither are any other redeemed by Christ, or effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.⁹

³ From *The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*.

⁴ Isa. 46:10; Eph. 1:11; Heb. 6:17; Rom. 9:15, 18; James 1:13; 1 John 1:5; Acts 4:27, 28; John 19:11; Num. 23:19; Eph. 1:3-5.

⁵ Acts 15:18; Rom. 9:11, 13, 16, 18.

⁶ 1 Tim. 5:21; Matt. 25:34; Eph. 1:5, 6; Rom. 9:22, 23; Jude 4.

⁷ 2 Tim. 2:19; John 13:18.

⁸ Eph. 1:4, 9, 11; Rom. 8:30; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Thess. 5:9; Rom. 9:13, 16; Eph. 2:5,12.

⁹ 1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Thess. 5:9, 10; Rom. 8:30; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:5; John 10:26; 17:9; 6:64.

7. The doctrine of the high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men attending the will of God revealed in his Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election; so shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God, and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel.¹⁰

When we read paragraph 3, we see that the drafters of the confession selected their wording very carefully to describe God as actively determining the salvation of His elect, but with regard to the reprobate, they are said to be ***“others being left to act in their sin to their just condemnation, to the praise of His glorious justice.”***

The Holy Scriptures teach us that all humanity is guilty before God for their sin. God would be just to condemn all the human race to eternal punishment for their sins. If He in His love, mercy, and grace, purposed to save some, that does not obligate Him to attempt to save all the human race. He may show mercy on some, but refuse to have mercy on others. He may leave them to receive justice when He condemns them for their sin on the Day of Judgment. Paul argued this point in Romans 9:

²²What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory-- ²⁴even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? (Rom 9:22-24)

But when we speak of God’s dealings with the non-elect as “others being left to act in their sin to their just condemnation, to the praise of his glorious justice”, we should not imagine that God is not in sovereign control of them, as He is over the lives of the elect. Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful king of the ancient world had come to understand that he and all people everywhere are governed by a sovereign God. When Nebuchadnezzar was walking about congratulating himself on being the most powerful man in the world, “a self-made man”, or so he thought, God revealed to him differently.

²⁸All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. ³⁰The king spoke, saying, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?”

³¹While the word was still in the king’s mouth, a voice fell from heaven: “King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! ³²And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.”

³³That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles’ feathers and his nails like birds’ claws.

³⁴And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever:

For His dominion is an everlasting dominion,

And His kingdom is from generation to generation.

³⁵All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing;

He does according to His will in the army of heaven

And among the inhabitants of the earth.

No one can restrain His hand

Or say to Him, “What have You done?”

¹⁰ 1 Thess. 1:4, 5; 2 Pet. 1:10; Eph. 1:6; Rom. 11:5, 6, 20, 33; Luke 10:20.

³⁶At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my honor and splendor returned to me. My counselors and nobles resorted to me, I was restored to my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added to me. ³⁷Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.

Nebuchadnezzar came to know the true sovereign nature of God. It would seem that he understood God more fully than many professing Christians, who deny that God is in sovereign control over all that transpires in history, governing His world according to providence.

How then, does God in His providence govern the non-elect? ***First, God in His providence allows men to sin only to the degree that His purposes in history are furthered; He prevents them from going further if their behavior would not further His purposes.*** Psalm 76:10 reads, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise you; the remnant of wrath you will put on like a belt.” The psalmist was addressing God. He affirmed that God was using the wrath of Israel’s enemies to glorify Himself. The enemies of Judah and Jerusalem had come against them. But God intervened and overturned Israel’s enemies. In God’s defeat of them, He was glorified. Their hostility and effort to defeat Israel, resulted in God being glorified in their overthrow. Ultimately on the Day of Judgment, when God administers His justice upon sinners and they are consigned to a just everlasting punishment in hell, God will be glorified through their sin. It could be said that “the wrath of man” shall result in God’s glorification. God is in sovereign control of sinners. He only allows them to sin of their own “free will” according to His providence. God is not the author of their sin, but He does sovereignly govern them even while they are in the act of their sinning.

That God is able to restrain from sinning those who are not His people is clear, when it is in His purpose to do so. We read of God preserving the integrity of Sarah, Abraham’s wife, even when Abraham had wrongly placed her in a place of risk. We read in Genesis 20 this account:

And Abraham journeyed from there to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and stayed in Gerar. ²Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.

³But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, “Indeed you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man’s wife.”

⁴But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, “Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also? ⁵Did he not say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she, even she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this.”

⁶And God said to him in a dream, “Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. ***For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her.*** ⁷Now therefore, restore the man’s wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.” (Gen. 20:1-7)

Here was a pagan king whom God in His providence did not permit to sin. God is able to restrain people from sinning, if it is in His purpose to do so. He is free to let them go on in their sin, but He is free to prevent them from doing so also.

God in His providence is not only able to prevent an individual from sinning when it is in His purposes, but He is able to prevent whole peoples from sinning as well. Under the Mosaic covenant, God required all the males of Israel to travel to Jerusalem three times a year to present themselves before God. But what of the security of their homes and towns when they were away? Would not their properties and perhaps families be at risk in the absence of the males? But God made the promise that no one would invade and threaten them during these times in which they were obeying the will of God by traveling to Jerusalem. In fact, no one would even covet their goods when they were fulfilling their obligation to the law of God. We read of this in Exodus 34:

“Three times in the year all your men shall appear before the Lord, the LORD God of Israel. For I will cast out the nations before you and enlarge your borders; neither will any man covet your land when you go up to appear before the LORD your God three times in the year.” (Exo. 34:23f)

But just as God can prevent whole peoples from attacking and afflicting His people, when it is in God’s providence to do so, He is also able to cause whole peoples to attack and afflict His people, when it is in accordance with His justice. We had earlier mentioned Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. God used Him as His “servant” to punish Judah and destroy Jerusalem. The people of Judah had broken their covenant with God that He had mediated with them through Moses. As result the people ceased to be the covenant people of God. They became a people cursed of God, a people on whom God would punish for their sins. God used Nebuchadnezzar to lead the armies of Babylon into Judah to destroy it and Jerusalem, and its temple. We read this in Jeremiah 25.

The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), ²which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying: ³“From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, even to this day, this is the twenty-third year in which the word of the LORD has come to me; and I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking, but you have not listened. ⁴And the LORD has sent to you all His servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear. ⁵They said, ‘Repent now every one of his evil way and his evil doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD has given to you and your fathers forever and ever. ⁶Do not go after other gods to serve them and worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands; and I will not harm you.’ ⁷Yet you have not listened to Me,” says the LORD, “that you might provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt.

⁸“Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Because you have not heard My words, ⁹***behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,***’ says the LORD, ***‘and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against these nations all around, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, a hissing, and perpetual desolations.*** ¹⁰Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. ¹¹And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

In a similar way over a century before this event the Lord had used the Assyrian Empire with its emperor, Sennecharib, along with the Egyptian Empire, to punish the northern kingdom of Israel and punish the southern kingdom of Judah. We read of this in **Isaiah 7:18ff**.

¹⁸And it shall come to pass in that day
That the LORD will whistle for the fly
That is in the farthest part of the rivers of Egypt,
And for the bee that is in the land of Assyria.

¹⁹***They will come,*** and all of them will rest
In the desolate valleys and in the clefts of the rocks,
And on all thorns and in all pastures.

²⁰In the same day the Lord will shave with a hired razor,
With those from beyond the River, with the king of Assyria,
The head and the hair of the legs,
And will also remove the beard.

²¹It shall be in that day

That a man will keep alive a young cow and two sheep;
²²So it shall be, from the abundance of milk they give,
That he will eat curds;
For curds and honey everyone will eat who is left in the land.

²³It shall happen in that day,
That wherever there could be a thousand vines
Worth a thousand shekels of silver,
It will be for briers and thorns.

²⁴With arrows and bows men will come there,
Because all the land will become briers and thorns.

²⁵And to any hill which could be dug with the hoe,
You will not go there for fear of briers and thorns;
But it will become a range for oxen
And a place for sheep to roam. (Isa. 7:18-25)

God whistled for Egypt and Assyria, and their armies come running to do His bidding, to destroy those who were under His judgment.

Although God had used the king of Assyria as His instrument to punish Israel, the Assyrian king did not do so with an understanding being used of Israel's God. The King of Assyria had not intended to be a tool of the Lord, for he believed that it was through his own wisdom and power that he had conquered the known world. We read of this in **Isaiah 10:5ff**.

“Woe to Assyria, *the rod of My anger*
And the staff in whose hand is My indignation.
⁶*I will send him* against an ungodly nation,
And against the people of My wrath
I will give him charge,
To seize the spoil, to take the prey,
And to tread them down like the mire of the streets.
⁷*Yet he does not mean so,*
Nor does his heart think so;
But it is in his heart to destroy,
And cut off not a few nations.
⁸For he says,
‘Are not my princes altogether kings?
⁹Is not Calno like Carchemish?
Is not Hamath like Arpad?
Is not Samaria like Damascus?
¹⁰As my hand has found the kingdoms of the idols,
Whose carved images excelled those of Jerusalem and Samaria,
¹¹As I have done to Samaria and her idols,
Shall I not do also to Jerusalem and her idols?’”

God determined that after He completed using Assyria as His instrument of judgment, He would judge the king of Assyria for his arrogance. We read this further in Isaiah 10:12ff.

¹²Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Lord has performed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, that He will say, “I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks.”

¹³For he says:

“By the strength of my hand I have done it,
And by my wisdom, for I am prudent;
Also I have removed the boundaries of the people,
And have robbed their treasuries;
So I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man.
¹⁴My hand has found like a nest the riches of the people,
And as one gathers eggs that are left,
I have gathered all the earth;
And there was no one who moved his wing,
Nor opened his mouth with even a peep.”

¹⁵Shall the ax boast itself against him who chops with it?
Or shall the saw exalt itself against him who saws with it?
As if a rod could wield itself against those who lift it up,
Or as if a staff could lift up, as if it were not wood!

¹⁶Therefore the Lord, the Lord of hosts,
Will send leanness among his fat ones;
And under his glory
He will kindle a burning
Like the burning of a fire.

¹⁷So the Light of Israel will be for a fire,
And his Holy One for a flame;
It will burn and devour
His thorns and his briars in one day.

¹⁸And it will consume the glory of his forest and of his fruitful field,
Both soul and body;
And they will be as when a sick man wastes away.

¹⁹Then the rest of the trees of his forest
Will be so few in number
That a child may write them.

We also read in the Old Testament that God is able to raise up small bands of criminals, or we might even refer to as a gangs, or terrorists, which God uses to punish and humble His people. This is in 1 Kings 11:14-25:

¹⁴*Now the LORD raised up an adversary against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite*; he was a descendant of the king in Edom. ¹⁵For it happened, when David was in Edom, and Joab the commander of the army had gone up to bury the slain, after he had killed every male in Edom ¹⁶(because for six months Joab remained there with all Israel, until he had cut down every male in Edom), ¹⁷that Hadad fled to go to Egypt, he and certain Edomites of his father’s servants with him. Hadad was still a little child. ¹⁸Then they arose from Midian and came to Paran; and they took men with them from Paran and came to Egypt, to Pharaoh king of Egypt, who gave him a house, apportioned food for him, and gave him land. ¹⁹And Hadad found great favor in the sight of Pharaoh, so that he gave him as wife the sister of his own wife, that is, the sister of Queen Tahpenes. ²⁰Then the sister of Tahpenes bore him Genubath his son, whom Tahpenes weaned in Pharaoh’s house. And Genubath was in Pharaoh’s household among the sons of Pharaoh.

²¹So when Hadad heard in Egypt that David rested with his fathers, and that Joab the commander of the army was dead, Hadad said to Pharaoh, “Let me depart, that I may go to my own country.”

²²Then Pharaoh said to him, “But what have you lacked with me, that suddenly you seek to go to your own country?”

So he answered, “Nothing, but do let me go anyway.”

²³*And God raised up another adversary against him, Rezon the son of Eliadah*, who had fled from his lord, Hadadezer king of Zobah. ²So he gathered men to him and became captain over a band of raiders, when David killed those of Zobah. And they went to Damascus and dwelt there, and reigned in Damascus. ²⁵*He was an adversary of Israel all the days of Solomon* (besides the trouble that Hadad caused); and he abhorred Israel, and reigned over Syria.

Now in God's providential dealings with the non-elect, he also restrains them from sinning to the degree that they are capable of sinning, God restraining them for the sake of His people. I believe that this is what is suggested by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7. There we read because of an unbeliever's marital tie to his Christian spouse, God regards him as "holy" or "set apart." We read in verses

¹²But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. ¹³And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. ¹⁴*For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife*, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. ¹⁵But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. ¹⁶For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

Now this passage may convey several points of emphasis, but I would say that it suggests that God will deal with the unsaved spouse of a Christian in merciful ways, perhaps keeping the unbeliever from sinning or from the consequences of sinning, because it would bring undue hardship upon the believing spouse.

But not only is God able to restrain unbelievers from sinning, God can also turn people over to sin more egregiously. This itself is a manifestation of God's judgment on sinners. We read this in Romans 1.

²²Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

²⁴Therefore *God also gave them up* to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, ²⁵who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

²⁶For this reason *God gave them up* to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. ²⁷Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

²⁸And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, *God gave them over* to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; ²⁹being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are whisperers*, ³⁰backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, ³¹undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; ³²who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them. (Rom. 1:22-31)

What are some lessons that we may take to heart today when we consider these matters? First, what are true disciples of Jesus Christ to do?

1. We are to possess a world view in which we understand that our God is at work in all that transpires.
2. We who are disciples of Jesus Christ are to be encouraged because we know and understand that our God is in control of all events that occur in our lives and that He has purposed that they will ultimately bring glory to our God as well as to us.

3. We need not fear what man may do to us.
4. Let us not envy the unbeliever in any of his ways or for any of his so-called blessings in life; they are designed by God to bring him to his own just end to answer before a holy God in judgment.
5. We may be assured that nothing can separate us from the love of God that we have in Jesus Christ.
6. We are not to be presumptive regarding our relationship with God; a right understanding of God's sovereignty manifested in His providence would lead us to be watchful and prayerful respecting our own souls.
7. We are to live for that to which all of God's providence is directed—to the glory of God and the well-being of the saints.

Second, what are some lessons that the one who is not a disciple in Jesus Christ?

1. Do not look to what is unfolding in your life to be evidence of God's favor of you. God overthrew Israel by them thinking that they were experiencing the blessing of God. Of them God has said, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them" (Rom. 11:9).
2. Biblical Christianity is the only truly pleasing and rewarding worldview that can exist in a fallen world that is falling apart about us.
3. "Be sure your sin will find you out." Be aware that you will not escape the consequences of your sin, unless you repent of your sin. As the Lord Jesus said, "Unless you repent, you will likewise perish" (Luke 13:1ff). As we considered several weeks ago God's purpose in the lives of the reprobate, the psalmist confessed before God, "Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. (Psa. 73:18f)
4. Flee to Jesus Christ as a sinner in need of God's mercy to forgive Your sin and that He would accept You into His kingdom of joy, peace, and righteousness due to His mercy and grace that He shows repentant sinners who believe on Him.

Now therefore, be wise, O kings;
 Be instructed, you judges of the earth.
 Serve the LORD with fear,
 And rejoice with trembling.
 Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,
 And you perish in the way,
 When His wrath is kindled but a little.
 Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him. (Psa. 2:10-12)

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,
 And to present you faultless
 Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,
 To God our Savior, Who alone is wise,
 Be glory and majesty,
 Dominion and power,
 Both now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24f)