

PROVIDENCE OF GOD

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter at the Hillsboro Church of Christ on October 18, 1959 and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, wrote a little book entitled *The Future of an Illusion* in which he set forth the idea that religion is merely a dream or a figment of man's imagination. He based his conclusions upon this supposed evidence: (1) Man looks out into the world about him and sees the ruthlessness of nature--such things as fire, tornadoes, floods, earthquakes, famines, disease and death. Man is greatly afraid. He longs for a protective father out there somewhere who will take care of him, so he begins to create his god. (2) Man looks next at man's inhumanity to man. Human beings are sometimes unjust and cruel to their fellow human beings, so man feels a need for a great judge who will set all things right and who will protect him. He takes another step toward creating his own God. (3) Man also realizes that he is growing old and he does not like the idea of extinction, dying as a dog dies, with no future life, so he dreams of a wonderful world beyond this one.

But The Evidence ...

In these simple suggestions, Freud has hit a heavy blow against many of the things which you and I hold dear. He has said that our belief in a heavenly Father who protects us and cares for us is simply an illusion, a dream, or, as he speaks of it, "the projection of a wish." It is all a figment of our imagination. Freud does not have an answer for the great mountain of evidence for the existence of God. He says nothing at all about the orderliness of our universe--how the stars, the planets, and our own world operate on schedule. For the wonderful creation of this world he has no explanation. He is looking in another direction, and he has no answer for these impressive facts. Science has a postulate: "From nothing, nothing comes." Freud has no answer, for man certainly has not imagined or dreamed the universe into existence. The fact that we have a world such as we now have, with intricate human beings like us, and with a marvelous system of productivity of the soil, is incontrovertible evidence that there was a creative mind who started it all. "From nothing, nothing comes." Sigmund Freud runs into the teeth of this kind of existence.

He is also blind to the evidence that comes through the inspiration of the Bible. This Bible is a unique book; its marvelous unity, its fulfilled prophecies for good and other super-human qualities must be explained somehow. All of these and other elements are evidences that it came from a supreme mind who guided men as they wrote. To explain the existence of this unique book on any other basis is simply to hide one's head in the sand.

Freud also has no answer for the influence and the tremendous grasp of truth of the divine Christ who came and lived among men. The impact that he had on his own generation, the quality of the teaching that he did, and the influence that he has had through the centuries must be explained some way. To say that there is no divinity, that it is merely a figment of man's imagination, is not only to deny the evidence of the universe, the evidence of an inspired Bible, but also the evidence of a divine Christ. But this is not an occasion when we can probe as deeply as we would like into these realms of evidence. I mention them simply that we might visualize these mountains of evidence on the other side of the question,

Logic?

When Freud says that God is simply a projection of a wish, an illusion that will die out when men become better informed, he really has marshaled no evidence, but has merely stated a hypothesis. When you strip it of all its extra verbiage, his argument is no more logical than for me to say that because my three little boys have a desire for a father to provide the necessities of life for them, provide protection for them, and to play with them, he is an illusion. Since they desire him, he cannot exist; he does not exist. It is only a figment of their imagination, a projection of their wishes. Freud has marshaled no evidence, but has simply recognized, as all of us do, that man is built with an incurable outreach toward God. In the South Sea Islands, or in Africa, or wherever you find men, there is an inclination to look up to worship. Freud has recognized this and from this fact has drawn a conclusion that does not follow. The evidence is all on the other side. God does exist and he does provide for his people.

God Provides

From time to time I want to deal with the great theme of God's divine providence. I do not believe, as do some, that when man gets up in the morning he is simply a creature of chance and that the events that happen to him during the day are the results of blind fate. I do not think I could begin the day if I believed that, if I thought that my existence was dependent simply upon the willy-nilly vagaries of nature. I do not think I could have the peace of mind to face a single day. But rather, I believe as the scriptures say, from one end of the Bible to the other, that there is an infinitely wise and powerful God and that he is concerned with the affairs of his children. I have never seen God in bodily form, yet I believe that he hears when we pray. I believe, as this Bible says, that God is concerned about his people and that the events of our lives are guided by his unseen but powerful hand.

In the book of James, the brother of our Lord wrote, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning." I believe that every good gift in our world comes by God's providence. "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." ( James 1:17-18). Another passage in the New Testament says "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16). Of all the passages, however, the one that we think of most readily when we think of God's providing for men is Romans 8:28, in which the apostle Paul says, "And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose." Some men would say of this passage, "Can it be true?" Others would say, "I wish it were true." Still others would say, "I hope it is true." But notice that Paul begins it, "We know." It is not merely a hope, or a wish, or a possibility, for Paul says, "We know that to them that love God all things work together for good."

The "know" that Paul uses from time to time are impressive. For example in II Cor. 5:1, "We know that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Again in II Tim. 1:12, "I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day." Over and over again Paul says, "We know." He says it here. "We know that to them that love God all things work together for good."

### He Did Not Say

When he wrote this he did not say that this was true of all men. He limited it to those who love God. There is no promise in the scriptures that God will take care of those who rebel against him. His promises of care and concern are for those who love him. Those who love him follow him.

Paul does not say that all things are good--wars or hate or lust for instance. He does not even say that some particular thing is good, but what he says is that he will so shape events for those who love him that all things will "work together for good."

We are aware that God is impartial and that as Christ said in Matt. 5:45, "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust." In other words, if you are a reprobate you will still have the sunshine or a beautiful day. If you are a devout Christian there will still be rainy days in your life. As Solomon wrote it in Eccles. 2:14, "One event happeneth unto them all." Whether we are righteous or not there will be sorrow and happiness in life. There will be shadows and heartaches even though one is as righteous as man can be. There will be sickness and death even though one is a devout Christian. Do not ever get the idea that the Bible teaches: "Become a Christian and avoid all suffering. You will never be sick anymore; you will ever have heartaches." That is not taught. What is taught is that while God in his infinite wisdom provides for Christians and infidels alike the same sunshine and the same rain, that for those who love him he will cause everything to work together for good.

This can be made a little plainer if we remember the closing words of Christ's sermon on the mount. In Matt. 7:24-27, he said, "Every one therefore that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And every one that heareth these words of mine and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish men, who built his house upon the sand." Now notice this: the rains came and the winds blew and beat upon both these houses alike, but one of them fell and the other remained firm. In the midst of the vicissitudes of life, the one who loves God will not fall. The events, the concerns of his life will so be guarded and guided and regulated by God that all things will work together for his eternal good.

### No Fair-Weather Prophet

Who was it that wrote these words that form our text? He was no fair-weather prophet. I like to read his own account of at least some of his hardships and sufferings, as he gave it in II Cor. 11:24-27. The one who wrote our text said of himself, "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of rivers, in perils of robbers, in perils from my countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in labor and travail, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." He certainly had his share of hardships, but after all of these he still wrote, "And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose."

When I begin a day I begin it with the confidence that God is in his heaven and that he knows that I am alive and in need of his help. Just as you and every other Christian, I begin it with a prayer that God will be with me and that he will guide me in what I do and think and say, that he will guard me from evil. That does not mean that I do not expect to be ill sometimes, that I do not expect to suffer loss and disappointment. But it does mean that I confidently believe that all of these things will be woven together into a pattern for my eternal good.

When Freud wrote about religion as a figment of man's imagination, a projection of man's wish and described man as simply a creature of blind fate, he was denying everything that I believe. I submit to you, on the basis of thousands of years of experience of God's people, that Freud was not right, but rather Paul was right when he wrote that all things work together for good.

## For Christians

These promises are for Christians and no man is a Christian until he has believed in Christ, made known that belief and obeyed his Lord's commands. Would you be a Christian? Would you enjoy the promise that God has given you that he will take care of you? As we close this study the invitation of our Lord is extended to you. Come let God know your faith, repent of your sins, be buried with your Lord in baptism and begin his kind of life. Will you come now?