

Lesson 2

God: His Moral Characteristics and Works

Are you sometimes filled with questions when you read in a newspaper of some great tragedy that has come into the life of a Christian? Have you seen an evil person achieve great success and riches through dishonest practices and wondered why God would permit such things to happen? Often our minds are troubled when we see what appears to be an injustice, and we question God.

When we understand more clearly the moral characteristics of God—His love and holiness—and how He works in the world today, we discover that there is purpose in everything that happens to us. God’s goal is to prepare us for His eternal kingdom, and He is active in our lives today to achieve that goal.

In this lesson we will study the moral characteristics of God, and we will see that God who created us is active in maintaining His creation and providing all that is needed to bring us into His kingdom. Yet, He allows us to make our own choices and bear the responsibility for the choices we make. Let us open our hearts to Him as we consider, in this part of our study, how much He loves us and how He rules His creation.



lesson outline

God's Moral Characteristics
God's Work of Creation God's
Work of Sovereign Rule

lesson objectives

When you finish this lesson you should be able to:

- Discuss the moral characteristics of God and their importance to His creatures.
- Describe God's activity in the creation, preservation, and sovereign rule of the universe.
- Explain reasons why Christians sometimes suffer in the providence of God while wickedness seems to go unpunished.
- Love and appreciate God more as a result of a better understanding of His characteristics and His works.

learning activities

1. Work through the lesson development, following the same procedures as you did in Lesson 1. As you answer the study questions, be sure to write your own responses before looking for answers at the end of the lesson.
2. When you have finished the lesson, take the self-test and check your answers carefully with those given in the back of this study guide. Review any items you answer incorrectly.

key words

atonement	holiness	preservation
compromise	intervene	providence
concurrency	justice	righteousness
create	maintenance	supreme
creative	merciful	uprightness
exalted	moral	

lesson development

GOD'S MORAL CHARACTERISTICS

In Lesson 1 we studied the characteristics of God's nature and His natural attributes. Now we want to consider God's *moral* characteristics. These are the characteristics that are revealed in God's dealings with men and women. They include *the holiness of God* and *the love of God*. First, we will look at the *holiness* of God.

The Holiness of God

Objective 1. *Identify true statements which explain the significance of God's holiness.*

By what characteristic would you like to be known in your neighborhood? A stingy person? A gossip? A good person? A friend? God was concerned that He be known among the nations by a specific characteristic. He wanted to be called *the Holy One* (Ezekiel 39:7).

We have learned that it is impossible for God to make an intellectual mistake because He is all-knowing. Because of His holiness, it is impossible for Him to make *moral* mistakes. Holiness is a characteristic of God which expresses the perfection of all He is. It is the basis for all of His actions. Thus, everything He does is right and good.

The word *holiness* contains the idea of *separation*. The perfect Divine Being is separated from and exalted (lifted up) above sinful people and evil. Yet, even though He is perfectly holy and separated from His creatures, He maintains a relationship with people in which He is very near to them. Later, we will see how this is possible.

We can observe God's holiness in His every attitude and action. Included in His holiness is love of what is good and hatred of what is evil. So God delights in uprightness and goodness, and He separates Himself from and condemns evil.

God's separation of Himself from people is necessary because of human sinfulness. This truth is pointed out many times in the Old Testament. God asked Moses to put a fence around Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:12-13, 21-25). He wanted the nation of Israel to realize that sinful people must be separated from the holy God.

The separation of God from sinful people is seen also in the symbolism of the tent, or tabernacle, that God asked Moses to construct in the desert. A very special part of it was closed off by curtains (see Exodus 26:33). Only one person was allowed in this part of the tabernacle, a sanctified priest, who was permitted to enter once each year to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat (see Leviticus 16). He did this to make atonement for the sins of the people in the presence of a holy God. In this way, God's people were made to see how much God hated their sin.

There are many other references in the Old Testament which emphasize God's holiness. Isaiah 59:2 and Habakkuk 1:13 teach that sin separates God from sinful people, and it separates sinful people from God. Job 40:3-5 and Isaiah 6:5-7 show us that if we have a true understanding of God's holiness, we will also realize how awful sin is. When we see the unlimited holiness of God, it

will produce sorrow for sin, confession of sin, and humility in each one of us.

- 1** Fill in the blank spaces based on the preceding Scriptures.
 - a** It is impossible for God to have contact with anything that is unclean because He is
 - b** Sin causes us to be from God.
 - c** A true understanding of God’s perfect holiness should cause us to realize

God’s holiness is the subject of many New Testament Scriptures also. We have already seen in Old Testament examples that people do not have direct access to God, nor can they get it through their own efforts. In the Old Testament a sanctified priest approached the presence of God to make atonement for the sins of the people. Now atonement is made through the sacrifice of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. According to Romans 5:2 and Ephesians 2:13-18, if we want to approach God it must be through the merits of Jesus Christ. First Peter 3:18 tells us that all of our uncleanness and unrighteousness is covered and atoned for by our righteous Savior, so that we can be brought into the presence of a holy God.

- 2** These Scriptures teach us that the only way we can come into God’s holy presence is through the atonement provided by
 - a) a sanctified priest.
 - b) our own efforts to be holy.
 - c) our Savior Jesus Christ.

We cannot speak about God’s holiness without also mentioning His righteousness and justice. Many Bible scholars classify these as separate attributes of the Godhead, but righteousness and justice are a direct result of God’s holiness. They are the aspect of His holiness which is seen in His treatment of people.

First, God’s holiness is expressed by *righteousness*. He has established a moral government in the world. This means He has given just (fair and right) laws under which people are to live. Second, His holiness is expressed by *justice*. He administers His laws fairly; He rewards those who obey His laws, and He punishes those who break these laws.

God’s righteousness is demonstrated by his love of holiness in people. Not only is He a holy God, but He requires that His people be holy. His justice is demonstrated by His judgment of sin. Because He cannot tolerate sin, He must punish those who sin.

3 Read Hebrews 12:10, 14 and answer this question: What does God require of me after I become a Christian and turn from my sinful ways?

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Holiness as a quality of the Christian life is more than *not doing what is wrong*. It is also *doing what is right*. In action it is expressed in right living and doing what the love of God leads us to do for others. It produces in us a feeling or concern for those around us.

We can, for example, maintain our obedience to God as we minister to people’s needs. We do not need to compromise Christian principles in order to serve others. The parable of Jesus recorded in Luke 10:29-37 illustrates the Christian *ideal* (standard of perfection) with which we should identify ourselves. At the same time, it demonstrates the kind of *activity* which expresses our ideals in a practical way to our fellowman.

4 Read Luke 10:29-37. In your notebook state which of the following expresses the Christian ideal of holiness in action and why: the Levite, the Samaritan, or the priest.

As we have seen in Hebrews 12:10 and 14, the Bible urges each of us to live a holy or separated life. A person can obey this command and at the same time involve himself in the life of the community as Jesus taught in Matthew 5:13-16. This Scripture teaches that we must not lose our holiness, but that we must be an example before others. Thus, a Christian will not involve himself in things that the New Testament does not permit. He will, however, do everything possible to serve his family and neighbors and show them that he cares about them.

5 As we consider God's righteousness and justice, we have a good example of how we should treat our children. Which of these will we do? (Choose the best answer.) We will

- a) punish our children often to remind them that they must always be good.
- b) be fair in our demands, reward them when they are obedient, and punish them when they are disobedient.
- c) warn them that they will be punished if they disobey, but never carry out any punishment, for that would make them doubt our love for them.

Question 5 reminds us that we need to know and understand the biblical principle concerning discipline. According to God's Word, one who does not consistently discipline his children contributes to their death (Proverbs 19:18). Hebrews 12:6 and Revelation 3:19 teach that God disciplines those He loves. If we truly love our children, we will discipline them for their own good (see Hebrews 12:5-11).

6 Circle the letters preceding TRUE statements concerning the significance of God's holiness.

- a Holiness is a characteristic of God which expresses His moral perfection.
- b Because of His infinite holiness, God cannot maintain a close relationship with His people.
- c The concept of holiness includes love of what is good and consistent with the laws of God and hatred of evil.
- d In Old Testament times, God made it clear that He would not separate Himself from His people even if they sinned.
- e The way God governs His people is a result of His moral character.
- f Because God is fair, He not only gives divine justice but He provides a way of atonement if people fail to obey Him.
- g The concept of holiness simply means not doing what is wrong.

The Love of God

Objective 2. *Choose a correct statement of what God's love means to us and how it is expressed.*

Suppose a young man told a young woman that he loved her. Yet after they were married, all he did was complain to her. He showed no interest in what was important to her, and he made no effort to be kind to her. How would you judge his love for her?

God is not like that. He dearly loves you and me, and He shows it not only in words and promises but also by what He does.

There is nothing we can do to merit or earn God’s love. Nothing we could say or do would obligate God to love us. It is just a part of His nature to love. He loves the world. He loves us.

God shows in practical ways how much He loves us. Some people list *goodness, mercy, patience, and faithfulness* as separate attributes of God, but I consider them to be a part of His love. You will probably think of other aspects of His love that could be added to the list. These attributes show us just how important we are to Him. They remind us of how much concern He has for us.

7 Read John 3:16; 17:24; 1 John 4:9-10; and Revelation 1:4-5. These verses show that God’s love is active. What kind of action expresses this love?

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8 Read John 13:34-35; 14:15; 15:13-14; and 1 John 5:2-3. In your own words state two ways we show our love for God.

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In the Old Testament, God is often pictured as a great and powerful warrior. To see Him there also as a loving God overwhelms me. One of the most amazing examples of His love shows the Lord as an angry destroyer about to punish a wicked city, but He is reluctant—He holds back. Why doesn’t He go ahead with His plan? After all, the walls have already caved in, and nothing more is in the way. However, something does hold Him back—His love for those evil people. Here is what He says: “I looked for someone who could build a wall, who could stand in the places where the walls have crumbled and defend the

land” (Ezekiel 22:30). If some righteous person had been there to plead to Him for mercy, He would have spared the city. What love that shows!

David, Isaiah, and Jeremiah present God as *a father*. What concern of a good father for his children led them to make this comparison? David said that God is kind to His children. He remembers that they are helpless (Psalm 103:13-14). Isaiah thinks of God as the *merciful* father (Isaiah 63:16; 64:8). Jeremiah sees God as the father who, after punishing His disobedient children, gently leads them home (Jeremiah 31:7-9).

In the New Testament we have the supreme example of God’s love. When Jesus came to earth to pay the penalty for our sins, He revealed the terrible wages of sin (death). He provided our salvation at immeasurable cost—His own life (John 3:16-17). Since God loves us so much, we know that He will never allow anything to take place in our lives that cannot be worked out for our ultimate good if we love Him. We can rest assured of His love regardless of our circumstances. His love delivers us from fear and its torments (1 John 4:18; 2 Timothy 1:7).

9 In your notebook, list all the characteristics of God that you can find in Isaiah 43: 1-5. You should find three of His natural attributes and two moral attributes.

10 Do you have friends who do not realize that God loves them? Read Matthew 24:14; 28:19; and Acts 1:8. Based on these passages, write in your notebook what your responsibility is to those who do not know about God’s love.

Ezekiel 18:1-32 reveals the great love God has for His people. While they sometimes fail to recognize the reason for their hardships, God explains that what He wants from them is obedient service. Judgment is given to get their attention and to bring about restoration and healing in their relationship with God. Verses 31 and 32 indicate the degree of God’s love for Israel and His unending desire for the people’s salvation:

Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!

11 Choose the correct statement of what God's love means to us and how it is expressed. God's love

- a) reveals that no matter how people respond to Him, He will overlook their sin.
- b) reveals His goodness, mercy, longsuffering, and grace in His relations with people, and it is expressed in an active way as forgiving sin.
- c) results in punishment, and it is expressed in His refusal to hold back and give people another chance to obey Him.

GOD'S WORK OF CREATION

Objective 3. *Choose statements which explain God's creative acts and their significance for us.*

Now we will consider the works of God: 1) His *creative acts*, 2) His *sovereign rule* of the universe, which includes His *maintenance* or *preservation* of His creation, and 3) His *providence* which brings about His eternal purpose. First, we will look at what the Bible teaches about His creation of all things.

People often stand out in history not because of who they *are*, but because of what they have *done*. For example, Madame Marie Curie is not famous because she was a member of a royal family, but because she was the physicist and chemist who discovered radium and polonium.

By contrast, the Supreme Being of the universe is important to us because of who He is. At the same time, what He *does* (His works) is of great importance to us. The first work of God was the creation of the universe (Genesis 1 and 2).

By the exercise of His creative power, God brought into existence the whole visible and invisible universe. This includes the systems of the material universe (sun, moon, stars, planets, etc.) and

all orders of beings including all spiritual beings except Himself. This creation is clearly stated in Scripture, as we shall see.

The biblical account reveals a series of creative acts which, taken together, make up one great process of creation (Genesis 1, 2, and Psalm 33:6). The fact of creation has meaning for our lives in several ways:

1. Knowing that the Creator of the universe existed before all else should cause us to marvel at God's eternal greatness and majesty and should make us realize our own insignificance by comparison.

2. The Lord of all creation has a rightful claim on His creatures, that of obedient worship and service.

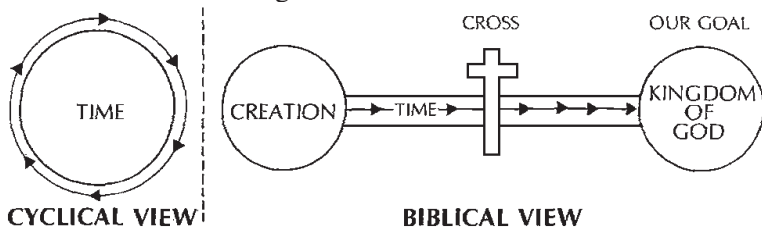
3. In creation we see a general revelation of the Creator in which His wisdom, power, and concern for His creation are seen (Romans 1:18-20).

4. The biblical teaching on creation is basic to our faith, for we could never fully commit ourselves for eternal salvation to anyone of lesser power than the Creator revealed in Scripture.

We do not have to wonder *why* God designed and produced all things. He did it for His glory (see Psalm 19:1; Isaiah 43:7; 48:11; Revelation 4:11). People go through life with the search for happiness as their only pursuit, but real happiness comes only as we seek to glorify God. We were made for that express purpose, and it is our key to happiness.

A friend of mine once complained to me that he was unhappy because he had not been able to do something great for God. I asked him, "Is your highest goal to glorify God in what you do? Are you willing to allow *anything* to happen in order to achieve that goal?" My friend realized that his own ambition to do something great had actually been the important goal in his life. He was just deceiving himself into thinking he wanted to do it for God. Jesus said, "For whoever wants to save his own life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it" (Mark 8:35). We are created to bring glory to God.

In some societies the universe is seen as everlasting, with its history moving through endless cycles of creation, destruction, and recreation. The only real goal of persons in these societies is to be set free from an existence filled with despair. The biblical concept of the universe has a beginning (the creation of all things), a purpose (the salvation of man through Jesus Christ), and the promise of eternal life in the kingdom of God. These two views are illustrated in this diagram:



12 In your notebook, explain how these views compare with the one held by most people you know. How does the view of the society in which you live compare with the biblical view?

God’s creative acts are not limited to what He has done in the past. John 3:3, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15, and Psalm 51:10 state that God purifies the hearts of those who repent of their sins and come to Him in faith. These Scriptures also tell us that when a person turns to God for salvation, he is born again and becomes a new creature, or a new creation. Thus, (God’s creative acts include the spiritual creation that takes place when a person accepts Jesus Christ as Savior.

13 Circle the letters preceding statements which are TRUE.

- a God’s creative works reveal His characteristics in a general way to His creatures.
- b Creation makes us aware of God’s eternal greatness and majesty and our unimportance in comparison to Him.
- c The revelation of God in His creative acts calls for no response from His creatures.
- d The knowledge of God’s power and nature as revealed in His creation of all things should lead us to glorify Him.
- e God’s creative acts are limited to the events recorded in Genesis 1 and 2.

GOD'S WORK OF SOVEREIGN RULE

Objective 4. *Apply principles to life situations and choose correct definitions of God's sovereign rule of the universe.*

The supreme Creator of the universe has sovereign rule over everything He has created. What does this mean? The word *supreme* means "highest in rank or authority, highest in degree or quality." God is superior in every way to everything else that exists. The word *sovereign* means "freedom from outside control, power to do as one pleases. "

Thus, the sovereignty of God describes His supreme rulership of the universe (1 Timothy 6:15). His sovereignty is manifested in His direction of the events of the universe according to His will (Ephesians 1:11). The Scriptures clearly teach the sovereignty of God: 1) as our Creator, He has the right to rule over us (1 Chronicles 29: 11; Matthew 20: 15; Ezekiel 18:4); 2) He does whatever He pleases (Psalm 115:3; Daniel 4:35); 3) there is purpose in all that He does (Romans 8:28; Isaiah 48:11).

The other day I read in the newspaper about the brutal murder of a beautiful, little, five-year-old girl. How could this happen if God is really good, really sovereign, and has all power to do what He pleases? Why does He allow things like this to happen? We will find some answers to these questions as we consider various aspects of God's sovereign rule of the universe. God's sovereignty involves *preservation* or *maintenance* of the universe, and *providence*. First, we will consider His preservation or maintenance of the universe.

Preservation (Maintenance) of the Universe

No architect, however brilliant, has been able to design a house that will never need repairs. No gardener carefully plants seeds for beautiful flowers without also maintaining them by pruning, weeding, and watering. The Bible teaches us that the universe also needs to be preserved or maintained (Acts 17:28; Hebrews 1:3).

God actively maintains, or cares for, the universe. The Scriptures show that, following His work of creation, God

continues His activity by caring for all things (Psalm 104). This includes people and animals (Psalm 36:6) and protection of those who are upright and just (Proverbs 2:8).

The apostle Paul declared, “For in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). God would not be sovereign if anything existed or took place in the universe apart from His will and power. Scriptures such as Nehemiah 9:6 and Psalm 145: 14-16 teach that God is actively involved in preserving all things. Other Scriptures declare that the Lord preserves His people (Deuteronomy 1:30-31; Psalm 31:20; 34:15,17,19; Isaiah 43:2).

We must recognize that divine preservation is necessary because everything God created is, in being and action, absolutely dependent on Him. The creature does not have the power within itself to continue to exist. It exists and continues because of the will of its Creator. It is by the word of His power that it and the entire universe is sustained or maintained (Hebrews 1:3).

While all things keep on existing by the continued exercise of God’s will, He has given to each part of His creation certain properties appropriate for its maintenance. In the physical world, He works through physical properties and laws, which we sometimes refer to as the “laws of nature.” In the intellectual world, He works through the properties or capacities of the mind; He has given us the ability to think, to feel, and to make choices. God works through these properties in His dealings with us. In preserving the world, God does not disturb what He established in Creation. He simply maintains what He has created.

14 (Choose the correct answers.) God’s maintenance of His creation means that

- a) He has limited power to replace anything that becomes damaged.
- b) He is actively involved in preserving all things.
- c) every part of His creation has the ability to maintain itself.
- d) He gives needed properties to each part of His creation, and He works through these properties in caring for all things.
- e) by God’s will all things in the universe continue to exist.
- f) He provides care and protection for His people.
- g) He is concerned only with the preservation of upright people.

Providence

Objective 5. *Identify examples of purposes, elements, and effects of God's providence.*

Another aspect of God's sovereign rule is His *providence*. While this includes the idea of preservation, it is much more than that. It also means God's ability to look ahead, to foresee, and to plan in advance. It refers to God's ability to fulfill His ultimate purpose in creation, which is the establishment of His kingdom under the rule of Jesus Christ. It speaks of the activity of God by which He maintains, cares for, and governs what He has created. How He does all this is a mystery, but there are some things about God's providence as it relates to us that we do know:

1. God is personally involved with the world He has created.
2. He causes everything in nature to move as He intended.
3. He enables and prompts people to function as responsible, moral agents with freedom to choose between right and wrong.
4. If man chooses to accept the salvation He has offered, God has provided for him eternal life with all the joy and splendor that His majesty affords.

Purposes of Providence

There are several purposes to God's providential rule which involve God's relationship with His creatures who love and obey Him:

1. *God's rule is characterized by concern for us.* Many Scriptures reveal that *God rules with a view to the happiness of His people.* Psalm 84:11 declares, "No good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless." Other Scriptures such as Acts 14:17 and Romans 8:28 also reveal God's concern for our happiness and well-being.

2. *God's rule is characterized by His concern for the mental and moral development of His people.* God's dealings with His people throughout history have involved educating them so they would realize 1) what He requires of them; 2) that His nature is holy; 3) that sin is an offense to Him; and 4) that He offers forgiveness for sin and reconciliation with Himself. In the early days He permitted such things as divorce because the people

were immature (lacked growth). Mark 10:5 speaks of this. The laws of the Old Testament and the levitical system of government were part of the developing process. They prepared the way for the revelation of the Lamb of God (Jesus) who takes away the sin of the world. All of God's providence in leading His people to spiritual maturity is for the purpose of preparing them to be His special possession.

3. *God's rule has as its primary goal His own glory* (Ephesians 1:11-14). All of His perfections are manifested through His rule. This means that His divine providence reveals to us the qualities of His being. For example, His *love is* revealed in His provision for His creatures, particularly in providing for their redemption through His Son. His *truth* is revealed both in the laws of nature and in His faithfulness in fulfilling the promises in His Word. His *holiness* and *righteousness* are revealed in His hatred of sin. His *power is* demonstrated in His work of creation, redemption, and providence. His *wisdom is* seen in the way He works to bring about His purposes. As we recognize the wonder of our great Creator, we give honor and glory to Him.

15 Which of these is a correct definition of the term *providence*? It is

- a) preservation of all things by which God gives each part of His creation the ability to care for its own needs without any dependence upon Him.
- b) God's rule by which He maintains, cares for, and governs His creation, preparing it for His eternal kingdom.

16 Match the purpose of providence (right) with its description (left).

- | | |
|---|--|
| a God works in all things with concern for people's well-being. | 1) The glory of God |
| b God provides for the education of people concerning Himself and His requirements, so that they become His special possession. | 2) People's mental and moral development |
| c God's demonstration of the qualities of His being reveals this. | 3) People's happiness |

Elements of Providence

What are the elements of providence? Many Bible scholars suggest that there are three aspects to God's providence. However, they do recognize that there is some overlapping and that the three are never separated in the work of God. They are *preservation, concurrence, and government.*

1. *Preservation.* We have already discussed God's preservation or maintenance of the universe as a part of His sovereign rule over all things. God is actively involved in preserving His creation. Everything God created is absolutely dependent on Him. Yet, He has given properties to each part of His creation to provide for its maintenance. Genesis 1:24-25 indicates that God has endowed each creature with certain natural characteristics that are unique to it. Each grows, develops, matures, and reproduces according to its kind.

2. *Concurrence.* The term *concurrence* means "agreement, cooperation, or consent" It gives the idea that no activity of matter or the mind can take place without God's consent, and that His power cooperates with powers that are under him. In Acts 17:28 and 1 Corinthians 12:6 the apostle Paul indicates that without God's *concurrence* no force or person can continue to exist or to act. Thus, God's power has a strong influence on man's power without destroying it or robbing man of his freedom. Man has, keeps, and uses his natural powers as God preserves his mind and body in their natural functions.

Since God is the basis of man's existence, we cannot say that man's part is equal to God's part. Here again, we see a profound mystery: God has given man natural powers which can be exercised for good or evil. When these natural powers are used in an evil way, man alone is responsible, for God does not cause man's evil acts (Jeremiah 44:4 and James 1:13-14). God *concurr*s in the acts of man in giving him natural powers, but the evil direction of these powers is caused by man. An example of concurrence is the case of Joseph (Genesis 45:5; 50:20). Here we see that while his brothers used their natural powers to do evil, God overruled the action for good. He consented to, or permitted, their action, but He worked through it according to His purposes.

Paul says that God “works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will” (Ephesians 1:11), and that God works in us “to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13). He gives us insights into life situations and guides us by His Spirit. He warns us of the consequences of failure and woos us gently. Yet, He does not make a mockery of our freedom by forcing His will on us. In the salvation experience, He begins His beautiful work standing on the outside of our heart’s door knocking, but we must open the door (Revelation 3:20). Then, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us. He maintains control of our lives as long as we remain surrendered to His lordship. Our relationship with Him as our Lord continues on the basis of our love for Him and our choice to give Him control of our lives.

3. *Government.* This refers to the activity of God’s rule with the objective of accomplishing His divine purpose. As we have seen, God governs the physical world by means of laws He has established. He governs people through the laws and properties of the mind and by the operation of the Holy Spirit. In doing this He uses all kinds of influences, such as circumstances, motives, instruction, persuasion, and example. He works directly through the operation of the Holy Spirit to influence the intellect, the emotions, and the will of man.

God governs in at least four ways. Understanding these ways helps us to see the relationship between God’s absolutely sovereign will in working out His divine plan and the will of man in free activity.

- a. Sometimes God *does not do anything* to prevent man from doing what he has chosen to do. This does not mean God approves when a person sins, but He does not impose His power to prevent it. Examples of this are given in Acts 14:15-16 and Psalm 81:12-13.
- b. Sometimes God *does prevent* men from committing sin by influencing them not to sin. Examples are Genesis 20:6, 31:24, and Hosea 2:6. The Psalmist prayed for this kind of help in Psalm 19:13, “Keep your servant from willful sins”
- c. Sometimes, under divine *direction*, God *overrules* the acts of evil men, using them to accomplish good results.

We gave an example of this earlier in reference to Joseph. His brothers sinned, but God used it to accomplish something good.

- d. Finally, sometimes God *determines to limit* sin and wickedness. Scriptures such as Job 1:12 and 2:6 indicate that God has set limits on satanic activity. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10:13, declares that God has also put a limit on the tests and temptations which Christians must endure.

Providence gives us the idea that God rules over all things in love. This love reaches its highest expression in the words of the apostle, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

17 Match the elements of providence (right) with a description of each (left).

- **a** God’s power cooperates with powers that are under Him, but while He permits those powers to make their own choices, He does not Himself cause evil acts.
- **b** God rules in a way that will accomplish His divine purposes. This means that sometimes He does nothing, sometimes He prevents, other times He overrules, and at times He limits activities intended for evil.
- **c** God has given His creatures natural properties through which He works to provide for their maintenance; everything He created is absolutely dependent on Him for existence.
- 1) Preservation
2) Concurrence
3) Government

Effects of Providence

How does providence affect personal experience? Many Scriptures reveal God’s promise to prosper the righteous (see

Leviticus 26:3-13 and Deuteronomy 28:1-14). He does bless His own—His blessings are far too numerous to mention.

But the righteous often wonder, “Why do the wicked prosper also? Why do they go unpunished?” The Psalmist responds that 1) their prosperity is only temporary, and 2) God will eventually judge their wickedness (Psalm 37:16-22; 73:1-28; see also Malachi 3:13-4:3).

So when someone asks you, “Why doesn’t God put a stop to all this violence?” you can in all confidence reply, “Just wait and see the final act of this drama. God has already begun His plan to get rid of selfishness, despair, rebellion, and corruption. In His eternal plan there will be blessing and prosperity for all who love Him.” In the meantime, God delays judgment in order to give the wicked an opportunity to repent (Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

Another question often asked by Christians is: “Why must the believer suffer so many trials if God is in absolute control of events of this life?” The Bible reveals several reasons:

1. Trials may be permitted for the believer’s spiritual development (Psalm 94:12; Hebrews 12:5-13).
2. Trials may represent testing in preparation for greater avenues of service (1 Corinthians 16:9; James 1:2-12).
3. Affliction will also bring glory to God if we respond to it in the right way (see Job 1, 2, and 42).
4. Trials are a part of the calling of the church (John 15:18; 16:33; Acts 14:22; 1 Peter 4:12-19).

Because of the fact that sometimes God does actively intervene in the affairs of people, we know that we can have an effective part in other people’s lives as we pray. Moses pleaded with God, and Israel was saved from destruction. Elijah prayed, and the palace was stirred. There are many examples in both the Old and New Testaments of God’s intervention when people prayed. God does some things as a direct answer to people’s prayers. He does other things without anyone’s praying about them. Sometimes He does things that seem to be the opposite of what we pray for because in His sovereignty He is working for our higher good. Henry C. Thiessen sums this up by saying, “If

we do not pray for the things that we might get by prayer, we do not get them. If He wants some things done for which no one prays, He will do them without anyone's praying. If we pray for things contrary to His will, He refuses to grant them. Thus, there is a perfect harmony between His purpose and providence and man's freedom." (1979, p. 129).

So as we have seen, Christians do sometimes suffer as a result of living in an evil world. God, who is in control, does not always prevent wicked people from doing evil deeds. Christians, as well as non-Christians, may suffer as the result of accidents or carelessness. God does not usually interfere with normal, physical laws or our own freedom of choice. Everyone lives in a world in which each person is subject to accidents and eventually death. Our goal is not to fulfill our ideas of life, but rather to live in a way that will bring glory to God. God's love for us never changes, and He has promised that if we love Him, He works for our good in all things. With this knowledge we may trust ourselves to our sovereign God, believing that the reasons for any circumstances He brings, permits, determines, or prevents will someday be as clear to us as they are to Him.

18 Now in your own words, answer the question given at the beginning of this section on sovereign rule: "How could God permit the murder of an innocent little child?" Use your notebook.

19 Read the following Scriptures and write 1 in the blank space if the statement is an example of the providence of God in dealing with people. Write 2 if it is an example of man's personal choice in which God did not intervene.

- ... **a** Judges 15:16-19: The provision of water for tired Samson
- ... **b** Acts 24:24-26: Felix postpones a decision to accept the gospel
- ... **c** Daniel 2:10-23: The revelation to Daniel
- ... **d** Genesis 22:13: The ram caught in the thicket
- ... **e** Judges 11:30-36: Jephthah makes a foolish vow to God

20 Explain the effects of God's sovereign and providential rule in each of the following circumstances. Base your response on principles taught in this lesson. Use your notebook.

- a** John was a minister in a neighborhood of rough gangs. He faithfully worked in the community until he was beaten to death by a gang. His death shook the community. As a result of his example, many young men and women of the streets came to know Christ.
- b** Robert was dying of cancer, but through the prayers of friends he was miraculously healed.
- c** James was climbing a dangerous mountain with his friends when he fell and broke both legs.
- d** Simone was attacked and badly beaten as she walked home from church. Through this experience she increased her efforts to lead people to Christ.
- e** Raymond, a gifted child, ran out of a roadside restaurant into the path of a speeding car and was killed.
- f** Henry lives for himself and is dishonest in his business dealings. Yet, he seems to prosper in all he does.
- g** A missionary has a flat tire on his way to the airport and misses his plane. Later he learns that the plane crashed and all on board were killed.

self-test

TRUE-FALSE. Place a T in front of each true statement and an F in front of each false statement.

- **1** Holiness is a characteristic of God which expresses the perfection of all He is.
- **2** Because God is infinitely holy and man is sinful, the relationship between them is an impersonal orate.
- **3** While God's holiness demands separation from that which is sinful, He has in mercy and love made a way to end the separation by providing a sacrifice.
- **4** God's love is shown best by what He *says*.
- **5** The value of love is proved by what one does; that is, one's actions demonstrate love.
- **6** If a person truly loves God, he will show it by his obedience.
- **7** Creation as a work of God is significant only as it shows the majesty of God's power. This calls for no response in the creature.
- **8** God's sovereign rule means that He is free from external (outside) control and that He can do whatever He pleases.
- **9** When we speak of God's work of maintenance of the universe, we understand that He is actively preserving what He has created.
- **10** Providence refers to God's ability to foresee all things and to direct creation toward the end he has determined for it: the establishment of a kingdom under Jesus Christ.
- **11** God's *government* includes the idea that He sometimes sets limits on sin and wickedness and on trials that Christians must endure.

- **12** While prayer is an activity that brings us close to God, it cannot influence His sovereign acts.
- **13** While God has established natural laws and given people freedom of choice, He works through these means to bring about His purpose.
- **14** God's providence includes the principle that Christians must suffer in this world while sinful people can expect to prosper.

answers to study questions

10 In these passages of Scripture, Jesus instructed His disciples to take the news of God's love and salvation to every creature. God has chosen to use us to tell others of His love.

- 1 a** holy.
- b** separated
- c** how awful sin is.

11 b) reveals His goodness, mercy, longsuffering, and grace . . .

- 2 c)** our Savior Jesus Christ.

12 Your answer. (In many societies there is great uncertainty about creation, the meaning of life, death, and judgment. No other view is as reasonable and comforting as the biblical view.)

- 3** Your answer should be similar to this: He requires me to be holy. He wants me to share in His holiness.

13 a True.

b True.

c False.

d True.

e False. (His creative acts continue in the spiritual creation that takes place when a person accepts Jesus as Savior.)

- 4** You should have said "the Samaritan," because he demonstrated doing what is right. He applied to life the principles he held.

14 Answers b), d), e), and f) are correct.

- 5 b)** be fair in our demands

15 b) God's rule by which He maintains, cares for

- 6 a, c, e, and f** are true.

16 a 3) People's happiness.

b 2) People's mental and moral development.

c 1) The glory of God.

- 7** God's love is expressed in giving something to His people.

- 17 a** 2) Concurrence.
b Government.
c Preservation.

18 Your answer. I would point out that God has given man a freedom of choice; thus, he may choose to sin if he desires. When this happens, the innocent suffer as well as the wicked. The Bible tells us that eventually the wicked will be judged and punished by God for the evil they do.

8 We show our love for God by our obedience to Him and our love for other people. (We can clearly see here that love is an active force.)

- 19 a** 1) Providence of God.
b 2) Man's personal choice.
c 1) Providence of God.
d 1) Providence of God.
e 2) Man's personal choice.

9 Verse 1: wisdom and omnipotence (natural) and love (moral).

Verse 2: omnipotence and omnipresence (natural) and love (moral).

Verse 3: holiness (moral).

Verse 4: love (moral).

20 Example **a** reflects two principles: Suffering can result from living for God in an evil world; sometimes God uses the actions of evil men to accomplish good results. Example **b** illustrates that God does some things as a direct answer to prayer, and the purpose is to bring Him glory. Examples **c** and **e** reveal that all people are subject to natural laws and the dangers in life. Example **d** illustrates that sometimes trials prepare one for greater service to God and can bring glory to Him. Example **f** shows that even non-Christians may benefit from God's grace. However, if Henry does not surrender his life to God, He will spend eternity separated from God, and he will be judged for his evil actions. Example **g** illustrates that sometimes when our plans don't seem to work out, God is working in the circumstances for our good.