

G P S

For Grandparents, Parents and Seniors

By Rick Shrader

Providence and Decision Making

When we are walking on life's road and navigating the junctions and choices in life, we need to remember that we are not alone. Though we have many companions and counselors helping us make the right turns, as believers we have a Friend Who never leaves us nor forsakes us. Our Lord Jesus Christ is now both human and divine, One Who knows our human sorrows and Who also sees with divine omniscience. Here is a child of Adam walking with the Son of God! This is a great partnership.

God's Providence

As God, our Lord has all the attributes necessary to guide us. His sovereignty will work all things together for our good (Rom 8:28). His omniscience sees the whole path we walk, not just the next bend in the road. His omnipotence gives Him the power to create, adjust, and change any circumstances to conform to His will.

The Lord also uniquely uses the means necessary to carry out His will for us. "He who calls you is faithful who also will do it" (1 Thes 5:24). In this age He does not need nor use miraculous means to direct our paths. We don't get hand-writing on the wall, audible voices thundering from heaven, nor inspired prophets to deliver the voice of God to us. His Word and Spirit are gifts enough. But the Lord does manipulate the circumstances behind the scenes in ways unknown to the human eye. "For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Rom 11:36).

We can also trust that the Lord's purposes are for our good. That does not mean that all of the circumstances along our road are easy or comfortable. In fact, for many they have been very difficult and often

have ended in persecution and death. Sometimes they are sickness, brokenness, and trial and we are tempted to complain and ask God why. Finally, however, we humble ourselves under His mighty hand and cast our cares upon Him because we know He cares for us (1 Pet 5:6-7). With such a Companion, we can finish our race with joy.

Our Responsibility

As a toddler hanging tightly to a father's hand, we hold and follow God's leading. This requires a life of learning but it starts with learning about Him. The Lord has given us all things that are needed for life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3). We grow and mature in these things as we learn His Word (2 Tim 3:16-17). The more we understand the Word of God the more we know how to be abased or to abound and endure all the twists and turns in life through Him Who strengthens us (Phil 4:12-13).

Purity is the first thing we learn (2 Pet 1:5). As the Word of God converts us and changes us into the person He wants us to be, we are more and more attuned to His will. To live a peaceable life is first to be pure and then gentleness follows (Jas 3:17).

Prayer is the key that causes us to be partners with the Lord as we hold His hand and follow along. Our prayers, when effectual and fervent, avail with God (Jas 5:16), i.e., they make a difference. They don't of themselves change things, but they petition God Who changes things. Prayer is our great asset in navigating life's road and following where God leads.

John Flavel: "Prayer honors providence, and providence honors prayer . . . Providences have borne the very signatures of your prayer upon them." Allen & Chester, *The Glory of Grace: an introduction to the Puritans*, p. 145.

Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies, Four Views

Brent Parker & Richard Lucas, editors

This is another “Views” books which gives the reader four different views on a subject. This is also the second of such books I have reviewed this year. This volume covers the same topics as last month’s book but by different well-known authors.

Covenant Theology, by Michael S. Horton, the J. Gresham Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics, Westminster Seminary. Horton is an obvious choice to write on covenant theology. His large volume on systematic theology, *The Christian Faith* (2011), has become a standard text for that point of view. Horton basically presents and explains the three “theological covenants” of covenant theology: the Covenant of Works, the Covenant of Grace, and the Covenant of Redemption. These are primarily defended from the Westminster Confession of Faith and other similar confessions (since they are not mentioned by name in the Bible). Horton goes on to link circumcision to infant baptism and Passover to communion in what he describes as a “Vista from the grand balcony of this covenantal house” (p. 60), though I think a view from the ground floor would have been more profitable.

Progressive Covenantalism, by Stephen J. Wellum, professor of Christian Theology, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Wellum has been the major voice for this more recent variation of covenant theology. He writes, “Progressive covenantalism argues that the Bible presents a *plurality* of covenants that *progressively* reveal our triune God’s *one* redemptive plan for his *one* people, which reach their fulfillment, *telos*, and terminus in Christ and the new covenant” (p. 75). There are two views among PC advocates that this section helps make clear. The first is Wellum’s “three horizons” of biblical interpretation: textual, epochal, and canonical. Textual is the immediate context; epochal is God’s unfolding plan; and canonical means considering a text with regard to what comes before and after. A second helpful explanation in this section is his extended discussion of typology. PC is heavy into type and antitype. “However, ultimately *the types reach their antitypical fulfillment first in Christ and then his people*” (p. 83).

Progressive Dispensationalism, by Darrell L. Bock, Senior Research professor of New Testament studies, Dallas Theological Seminary. Darrell Bock, along with Craig Blasing, also of Dallas Seminary, have become the leading voices in the PD movement. Bock describes his view by comparing it to traditional dispensationalism, especially each version’s view on Israel and the church. He writes, “The difference within dispensationalism is, whereas traditional dispensationalism kept the two tracks completely distinct, progressive dispensationalism brings them together so one people of God emerge among distinct structures of Israel, church, and then consummated kingdom” (p. 127-128). PD sees the kingdom existing today as an “already-not yet” kingdom (inaugurated eschatology). Among Bock’s many contributions to this view, one that clarified it was his view that in the millennial kingdom, the “one people of God” also means that even Israel will not have a more prominent place than the other nations. “Again, this is not Israel *over* the nations, but Israel *with* the nations” (p. 139).

Dispensationalism, by Mark Snoeberger, professor of systematic theology and apologetics, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary. Since this traditional dispensational view is what I believe, I enjoyed this section the most. In fact, I thought it was one of the best defenses and explanations recently given. Among the topics covered, I thought Snoeberger’s description of literal interpretation as “originalist” was unique, in keeping with current understanding of constitutional issues. Also, his explanation of how the OT is used in the NT was very helpful, including his criticism of typological methods. Perhaps the best contribution was his explanation of how the biblical covenants and biblical dispensations fit and work together including a unique chart (p. 166). Snoeberger lists the “formal” covenants: Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, New, and includes the Palestinian in some places. Other so-called covenants (such as Edenic, Protoevangelium, and Eternity) he labels as “arrangements” which contain no redemptive element and were not made with Israel specifically. The dispensations, then, are God’s way of administering His plan for the earth. Snoeberger also emphasizes that God’s glory in the millennial kingdom will be the culmination and the doxological (rather than redemptive) center, or “mitte” in God’s purposes. “The rule of God” is “God’s primary plan for achieving his own glory” (p. 164).