**Lesson 6**

**The Work of the Holy Spirit**

**The “work” of the Spirit = Divine “Providence”**

One of the least discussed and most misunderstood attributes of God is the attribute of **divine providence**. What is “providence”?

To begin with, God’s providence does not act in a vacuum. It is defined through the lens of God’s other attributes. God’s providence is sovereign, it is just, it is merciful, it is based upon God’s omniscience and omnipotence, it is exercised according to His perfect divine will, etc.

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The problem with defining divine providence is that definitions vary greatly, depending on one’s view of God and of man.

In regard to one’s view of God, you must answer the following questions:

* Is God sovereign in all things?
* Is God omnipotent and omniscient?
* Has God ordained all things, according to His divine will?
* Can God’s divine will be thwarted?

Your answer to those questions forms the basis for your view of divine providence. But also your view of man. Consider the following questions:

* Is man totally depraved?
* Is man able to thwart or disobey God’s decretive (secret) will?

The answers to these questions forms your definition of divine providence. Consider the following definitions:

**Wikipedia**— God's intervention in the world. A distinction is usually made between "general providence", which refers to God's continuous upholding the existence and natural order of the universe, and "special providence", which refers to God's extraordinary intervention in the life of people.

**Lutheran view**— According to J.T. Mueller, in Lutheran theology, divine providence refers to God's preservation of creation, his cooperation with everything that happens, and his guiding of the universe. While God cooperates with both good and evil deeds, with the evil deeds he does so only inasmuch as they are deeds, not with the evil in them.

**Roman Catholic view**— The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, “creation has its own goodness and proper perfection, but it did not spring forth complete from the hands of the Creator. The universe was created “in a state of journeying” toward an ultimate perfection yet to be attained, to which God has destined it. We call ‘divine providence’ the dispositions by which God guides his creation toward this perfection. God is the sovereign master of his plan. But to carry it out he also makes use of his creatures’ co-operation. This use is not a sign of weakness, but rather a token of almighty God’s greatness and goodness. For God grants his creatures not only their existence, but also the dignity of acting on their own, of being causes and principles for each other, and thus of co-operating in the accomplishment of his plan.”

**Arminianism view of “providence**”— The belief that God limits himself to give human beings free will to go against his perfect will so that God did not design or ordain sin and evil (or their consequences such as innocent suffering).

**Reformed view**— emphasizes the total depravity of man and the complete sovereignty of God. God's plan for the world and every soul that he has created is guided by his will or providence.

***Psalm 33:10-11—The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations;***

***He frustrates the plans of the peoples.***

***The counsel of the LORD stands forever,***

***the plans of His heart from generation to generation.***

Based upon this small sampling of definition you can see that the definition of “divine providence” is based on your view of God and man.

* A majority of people who would profess to believe in God believe that man’s relationship with God is **synergistic** . . . that man cooperates with God; that man possesses some degree of autonomy, self-direction and free will.
  + Based upon that view, such people see God’s power and will over man as being limited; that man has the ability to thwart God’s will. As such, God’s providence is limited in its scope and power. God “nudges” His creatures by influencing events, but He is not in absolute control of His creation.
* On the other hand, if you believe that God’s sovereign power and will are absolute, then you believe that God is **monergistic** . . . that God alone, without external influence, orders and controls every detail in creation; that God’s decretive will cannot be thwarted and that everything that happens is ordained by God. Man has no ability to act autonomously, outside of God’s will.

According to the Reformed View of God’s providence, God ordains and orders every detail of existence and events in His creation, down to the most minute detail. Nothing happens randomly or by chance, but only according to God’s sovereign will.

***Matthew 10:29-30— 29 "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.***

***Psalm 139:16— Your eyes have seen my unformed substance;***

***And in Your book were all written***

***The days that were ordained for me,***

***When as yet there was not one of them.***

***Matthew 6:27— "And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?”***

And when we talk about the providence of God we must understand that the primary member of the Triune Godhead that is active in sovereignly ordering all things in the world today is God the Holy Spirit.

God the Father is seated on the throne, ruling and reigning in heaven.

God the Son is seated at the right hand of the Father, ruling and reigning with the Father and interceding before the Father on behalf of the saints.

God the Holy Spirit is actively at work here in the world today, ordering all events in accordance with the divine will.

Arthur Pink begins this section with a very “unwoke” statement. “It is a great mistake to suppose that the works of the Spirit are all of one kind, or that His operations preserve an equality as to degree. To insist that they are and do would be ascribing less freedom to the Third Person of the Godhead than is enjoyed and exercised by men. The nature and kind of His works are regulated by His own will and purpose.”

**In other words**, the Holy Spirit is under no obligation to ensure equality of opportunity or outcome. He is sovereign over all His creation and answers to no one for why He does what He does.

**The Holy Spirit’s work on both the unsaved and the saved**

“The light that God furnishes different souls varies considerably, both in kind and degree. Many of the works of the Spirit, though perfect in kind and fully accomplishing their design, are wrought by Him upon and within men who, nevertheless, are not saved.”

Charles Spurgeon— “The Holy Spirit works in two ways. In some men’s hearts He works with restraining grace only; and the restraining grace, though it will not save them, is enough to keep them from breaking out into the open and corrupt vices in which some men indulge who are totally left by the restraints of the Spirit. God the Holy Spirit may work in men some good desires and feelings, and yet have no design of saving them. But mark, none of these feelings are things that accompany salvation, for if so, they would be continued. But He does not work Omnipotently to save, except in the persons of His own elect, whom He assuredly bringeth unto Himself. I believe, then, that the trembling of Felix is to be accounted for by the restraining grace of the Spirit quickening his conscience and making him tremble.”

**Question:** What is the significance of the Spirit’s restraining grace on the unsaved? What should be our reaction in light of this truth?

“The Holy Spirit has been robbed of much of His distinctive glory through Christians failing to perceive His varied workings. In concluding that the operations of the blessed Spirit are confined unto God’s elect, they have been hindered from offering to Him that praise which is His due for keeping this wicked world a fit place for them to live. Few today realize how much the children of God owe to the Third Person of the Trinity for holding in leash the children of the devil, and preventing them from utterly consuming Christ’s church on earth.”

**Question:** Why have we, as Christians, robbed the Spirit of much of His distinctive glory? Was this intentional?

We, as Christians, have robbed the Spirit of much of His glory out of ignorance. Because of our lack of knowledge, we have failed to glorify the Spirit for His work in restraining the unsaved. It is important that we understand and give thanks and worship to the Holy Spirit for His restraining grace. Were it not for the restraint of the Holy Spirit, our lives would be in much greater jeopardy than they already are. That is what will happen in the Tribulation when the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit is removed . . . the people of God will be relentlessly pursued and persecuted.

**The Spirit’s operation in the non-elect**

Arthur Pink refers to the operations of the Spirit in the non-elect as **general** and **inferior**, while referring to the operations of the Spirit in the elect as **special** and **superior**.

Regarding the **general and inferior** operations of the Spirit in the non-elect, Pink points to 4 specific operations of the Spirit.

**1. In restraining evil.**

“If God should leave men absolutely to their own natural corruptions and to the power of Satan (as they fully deserve to be, as He will in hell, and as He would now but for the sake of His elect), all show of goodness and morality would be entirely banished from the earth: men would grow past feeling in sin, and wickedness would swiftly and entirely swallow up the whole world. The world *hates* the people of God (Joh 15:19); why, then, does it not devour them? What is it that holds back the enmity of the wicked against the righteous? Nothing but the restraining power of the Holy Spirit.”

**2. In inciting to good actions.**

“Whatever morality and honesty, unselfishness and kindness, submission to the powers that be and respect for law and order which is still to be found in the world, must be traced back to the gracious operations of the Spirit.”

Pink cites the example of the Holy Spirit restraining King Saul from killing David and how the Jews found favor in the eyes of the Egyptians (who had previously bitterly hated them) when they prepared to flee Egypt.

**3. In convicting of sin.**

“Few seem to understand that conscience in the natural man is inoperative unless stirred up by the Spirit. As a fallen creature, thoroughly in love with sin (Joh 3:19), man resists and disputes against any conviction of sin. Being “flesh,” fallen man is perverse against the convictions of the Spirit (Act 7:51), and remains so forever unless quickened and made “spirit” (Joh 3:6).”

**4. In illuminating.**

This one is particularly frightening because of the self-delusion that accompanies knowledge of spiritual things . . .

“Concerning divine things, fallen man is not only devoid of light, but is “darkness” itself (Eph 5:8). He had no more apprehension of spiritual things than the beasts of the field. This is very evident from the state of the heathen. How, then, shall we explain the intelligence that is found in thousands in Christendom, who yet give no evidence that they are new creatures in Christ Jesus?—they have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit (Heb 6:4). Many are constrained to inquire into those scriptural subjects that make no demand on the conscience and life; yea, many take great delight in them. Just as the multitudes took pleasure in beholding the miracles of Christ, who could not endure His searching demands, so the light of the Spirit is pleasant to many to whom His **convictions**are grievous.”

**The Spirit’s operation in the elect**

“It should make it easier for the Christian reader to perceive the absoluteness of this necessity, when we say that **the whole work of the Spirit within the elect is to plant in the heart a hatred for and a loathing of sin as sin, and a love for and longing after holiness as holiness**. This is something that no human power can bring about. It is something that the most faithful preaching as such cannot produce. It is something that the mere circulating and reading of the Scripture does not impart. It is a miracle of grace, a divine wonder, which none but God can or does perform.”

**Total depravity apart from the Spirit**

Regarding the Total Depravity of man and the work of the Holy Spirit, Pink cites the hypothetical position of many professing Christians that men are only partially depraved. He then proceeds to refute this false teaching.

“If men are only partly depraved, if deep down in their hearts all men really love God, if they are so good-natured as to be easily persuaded to become Christians, **then there is no need for the Holy Spirit** to put forth His Almighty power and do for them what they are altogether incapable of doing for themselves. And again, if “being saved” consists merely in believing I am a lost sinner and on my way to hell, and by simply believing that God loves me, that Christ died for me, and that He will save me now on the one condition that I “accept Him as my personal Savior” and “rest upon His finished work,” then **no super-natural operations of the Holy Spirit are required to induce and enable me** to fulfill that condition—self-interest moves me, and a decision of my will is all that is required.”

“But if, on the other hand, all men hate God (Joh 15:23, 25), and have minds that are “enmity against him” (Rom 8:7), so that “there is none that seeks after God” (Rom 3:11), preferring and determining to follow their own inclinations and pleasures; if instead of being disposed unto that which is good, “the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Ecc 8:11); and if when the overtures of God’s mercy are made known to them and they are freely invited to avail themselves of the same, they “all with one consent begin to make excuse” (Luk 14:18)—then it is very evident that the invincible power and transforming operations of the Spirit are indispensably required if the heart of a sinner is to be thoroughly changed.”

“Again, if the Lord Jesus Christ came here to uphold and enforce the high claims of God, rather than to lower or set them aside, then it is clear beyond dispute that none but the Spirit of God can impart a genuine desire for such a salvation. And instead of “accepting Christ” and “resting upon His finished work” as the sole condition of salvation, the Holy Spirit demands that the sinner throw down the weapons of his **defiance**, abandon every **idol**, unreservedly **surrender** himself and his life, and **receive** **Him** as His only Lord and Master, then **nothing but a miracle of grace can enable any captive of Satan’s to meet such requirements.**

**Question:** What are the main points of Pink’s argument regarding the total depravity apart from the Spirit?

**1.** If man is not totally depraved . . . if man is either morally neutral or inherently good . . . then men can save themselves and there is no need for the Holy Spirit in the salvation of men.

**2.** If being saved is based upon merely agreeing that you are a sinner and that you “accept Jesus as your Savior,” then there is no need for the Spirit’s supernatural operation to induce and enable you to believe.

**3.** The view that man is morally neutral or inherently good is found nowhere in Scripture and is actually contrary to the teaching of Scripture. Scripture declares that man is born depraved and is unable to reconcile himself to God without the operation of the Holy Spirit.

**Objections to Total Depravity Proved False**

In opposition to his argument affirming the total depravity of man Arthur Pink presents several objections posited by those who disagree with him and then presents his response to each objection.

**Objection #1:** “There is in every human heart a desire for deliverance from misery and a longing after happiness and security, and those who come under the sound of God’s Word are naturally disposed to be delivered from the wrath to come.”

**Reply:** “But that desire and disposition is quite compatible and consistent with the greatest love to sin and most entire opposition of heart to that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord (Heb 12:14). What the objector here refers to is a vastly different thing from desiring heaven upon God’s terms, and being willing to tread the only path that leads there!” In other words, simply wanting to be spared the wrath to come is not the basis of true faith.

**Objections #2**: “The instinct of self-preservation is sufficiently strong to move multitudes to undertake many performances and penances in the hope that thereby they shall escape hell.”

**Reply:**  The stronger men’s belief of the truth of divine revelation; the more firmly they become convinced that there is a Day of Judgment, when they must appear before their Maker and render an account of all their desires, thoughts, words, and deeds—the most serious and sober will be their minds. Let conscience convict them of their misspent lives, and they are ready to turn over a new leaf; let them be persuaded that Christ stands ready as a fire-escape and is willing to rescue them, though the world still claims their hearts— and thousands are ready to “believe in Him.” Yes, this is done by multitudes who still hate the true character of the Savior, and reject with all their hearts the salvation that He has. Far, far different is this from a regenerate person longing for deliverance from self and sin, and the impartation of that holiness which Christ purchased for His people.

**Objection #3:** “All around us are those willing to receive Christ as their Savior who are altogether unwilling to surrender to Him as their Lord.” But is “surrendering to Him as Lord” really necessary? Isn’t it enough to “receive Christ as Savior”?

**Reply:** “They would like His peace, but they refuse His “yoke,” without which His peace cannot be found (Mat 11:29). They desire His promises, but have no heart for His precepts. They will rest upon His priestly work, but will not be subject to His kingly scepter. They will believe in a “Christ” who is suited to their own corrupt tastes or sentimental dreams, but they despise and reject the Christ of God. Like the multitudes of old, they want His loaves and fishes; but for His heart-searching, flesh-withering, sin-condemning teaching, they have no appetite.”

**An indictment of watered down preaching**

In an indictment of the watered down preaching from many pulpits, Pink states that “the reason why so few are aware of the awful depths of human depravity, the terrible enmity of the carnal mind against God, and the heart’s inbred and inveterate hatred of Him, is because His character is now so rarely declared from the pulpit.”

Why is this? Why is the character and holiness of God and the depravity of man so seldom preached from modern pulpits?

“It is just because modern Christendom has such an inadequate estimate of the fearful and universal effects that the Fall has wrought, that the imperative need for the super-natural power of the Holy Spirit is now so little realized. It is because such false conceptions of human depravity so widely prevail that, in most places, it is supposed all which is needed to save half of the community is to hire some popular evangelist and attractive singer.”