



THE FOREST HILL NEWS

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Forest Hill Church of Christ

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Matthew Jones, Associate
Haston Handley, Youth
Jordan Pugh, Youth

VISIT US SOON!

Sunday:

Bible Study..... 9:30 A.M.
Morning Worship.... 10:30 A.M.
Afternoon Worship.... 1:30 P.M.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 P.M.

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God's Providence and the Problem of Evil (Part 1)

Kyle Butt, M. Div.

In 2008, best-selling author and agnostic professor Bart Ehrman wrote a book titled *God's Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question—Why We Suffer* (2008). In the book, Ehrman presented his case for how the biblical answer to the problem of evil is insufficient. His analysis is incorrect and lacking in many ways, but the title of his book brings us to a crucial question regarding evil—why would Ehrman and a bulk of the unbelieving world seek such an answer **from the Bible**? Why put forth so much effort attempting to refute the biblical answer to suffering?

In truth, the “problem of evil” argument is built on the foundation of what the Bible says about God. As it is historically set out, the “problem of evil” contends that the three premises (1) God is all-loving; (2) God is all-powerful; and (3) evil exists, cannot all be true. Where did these three premises originate? The third, that evil exists, is a matter of personal experience and knowledge that virtually all humans can know intuitively. But the first two premises, that God is all-loving and all-powerful, are distinctly set forth in the Bible as attributes of God. Without the biblical insistence that God is all-powerful and all-loving, there would be no “problem of evil.” With that in mind, it would be unfair and dishonest for the skeptic to demand that the Christian answer the problem of evil without reference to the Bible. Yet, that is precisely what Ehrman and others expect. They attempt to discredit the biblical answers to the problem of evil. These attacks against the Bible's answer have been unsuccessful (Warren, 1972; Miller, 2015). In fact, one of the most impressive responses to evil is the biblical understanding of God's work through providence. For the purposes of this discussion, we will define providence as the way God orchestrates His will through natural laws. This idea is contrasted with God's miraculous intervention in human affairs. A miracle, such as Jesus walking on water or God's empowering Moses to put his hand into his cloak and it become leprous, is a recognizable overriding of certain natural laws. God's providence, on the other hand, is seen in cases where God works through natural laws to accomplish His will.

To illustrate this difference, let us consider specific examples. In 2 Kings 19, the story is told of Sennacherib's campaign against the land of Judah. The evil king and his Assyrian army encircled Jerusalem and were confident that they would soon crush the city. That did not happen, because one night an “angel of the Lord went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when the people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead” (2 Kings 19:35). This episode is a clear example of God miraculously intervening in human affairs. On a different occasion, the prophet Micaiah warned Ahab, the king of Israel, that he would be destroyed if he attacked Ramoth Gilead. Ahab ignored the warning from God's prophet and attacked the city anyway. In the course of the events, “a certain man drew a bow at random, and struck the king of Israel between the joints of his armor” (1 Kings 22:34). Ahab died of his wound exactly as God had foretold. Ahab's death, however, came about through what we would call natural events, not miraculous ones.

Another contrast between providential and miraculous involvement can be seen in the lives of Mary and Hannah. In the New Testament narrative of Jesus' birth, the Bible states that Mary would miraculously conceive Jesus even though she was a virgin (Matthew 1:18-25). In contrast, we read about the birth of Samuel to Hannah. She prayed earnestly for a son and God answered her prayer. Hannah's conception and birth of Samuel, however, were

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not miraculous but came about through her union with her husband Elkanah (1 Samuel 1:19-20; see Jackson, "A Study of Divine Providence"). Samuel's birth provides an excellent illustration of God's providence.

Throughout the course of human history God has worked His will through miraculous and providential means. In many eras of history He has used both at the same time, but in some instances and epochs, He has worked primarily through providence with very little or no recognizable miraculous activity. It is important to understand this truth, since it is often affirmed that if God has worked miracles in the past to aid his people, then He "should" be doing the same today. For instance, Bart Ehrman demands, "If he [God] could do miracles for his people throughout the Bible, where is he today when your son is killed in a car accident, or your husband gets multiple sclerosis, or civil war is unleashed in Iraq, or the Iranians decide to pursue their nuclear ambitions?" (p. 274). This idea is well-illustrated on Marshall Brain's Web site whywontgodhealamputees.com (2014). According to Brain, the fact that God does not miraculously regrow limbs proves that He is imaginary. In chapter 5 of his material, he says, "Nothing happens when we pray for amputated limbs. God never regenerates lost limbs through prayer.... Does God answer prayers? If so, then how do we explain this disconnection between God and amputees?" (2014).

Notice that Brain and Ehrman insist that if God is capable of miracles, then we should be seeing them now. But why must that be the case? Could it be that an all-knowing God has very good reasons why He is not at work in the same miraculous ways He worked in the past? In addition, the same Bible that tells us about God's miracles also lays out a very strong case for God's working through providential means. To demand that God must operate in the way that we insist He operate is more than slightly presumptuous, especially in light of the fact that He has given us ample information about other ways He works.

This play by unbelievers is more clearly seen in the proverbial story of the atheistic professor who stands before a class of freshmen and dares God to strike him dead. When nothing happens, the professor glibly comments, "I thought not," and assumes he has made his point. Could it be possible that there are good reasons God does not strike the professor dead? Certainly. Maybe God knows the man will repent in the future. Maybe He knows that this professor will find a cure for cancer, and although he will lose his soul, he will save many lives. The possibilities are virtually endless.

Ehrman and other unbelievers challenge Christians to produce modern miracles as evidence that God intervenes in the world today. They do so, however, refusing to recognize two important truths. First, even during the ages of human history when God performed miracles, He did not intervene to stop all suffering. People still got sick, had accidents, broke bones, suffered emotionally, and died. It is as if the skeptic insists that the Bible paints a picture of a God who swooped in miraculously to stop all suffering. Such was never the case. Miracles were isolated events designed to confirm the validity of the message of certain divine messengers (Miller, 2003). The Bible has never presented them as a wholesale answer to the problem of pain and suffering. Second, to insist that God must use miracles today

discounts the pervasive biblical theme of providence. Throughout history, one of God's primary modes of operation has been to providentially work through natural laws. To deny that this is the case is to turn a deaf ear to a massive amount of biblical testimony.

A BIBLICAL CASE FOR PROVIDENCE

When many people think about God working through miracles, they have a picture in mind of a God Who periodically interrupts the regular flow of things and tinkers with the laws that are usually in place. They see God as an intruder into the natural order that He initially set up and that He leaves alone for a large portion of time. It is as if God has created a cosmic aquarium filled with fish, rocks, hiding areas, and a water filtering system. He sits outside the system watching patiently until He is needed, dipping His hand into the system to add something here or take something away there. The problem with this view is that it pictures a system that somehow works independently of God. In this system it is thought that if God does not miraculously intervene, then the system still works fine.

The Bible provides a picture of God's activity in the world that is much different from this model. Instead of a self-sustaining system that God created at the beginning and primarily has left to its own devices, Scripture teaches that the entire system constantly relies on God. The writer of Hebrews explains that God appointed Jesus Christ as the heir of all things and that He is presently "upholding all things by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:2-3). It is not that at one time (but not now) He created and upheld the world, but that He is **at present** still upholding "all things." Paul confirmed this idea in Colossians when he spoke of Jesus, saying "All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist" (Colossians 1:16-17). Notice that not only was Jesus active in the Creation, but the created world continues to "consist" in Him. It is important to recognize that God originally designed a world of natural laws that would be ideal for Him to providentially use throughout the course of human history. His use of these laws to bring about His purposes is not an interruption of the regular flow of things, since the regular flow of things constantly depends on His power to sustain it. As Richard Bube wrote in his book *The Human Quest*:

The natural order exists only because God is constantly active in upholding it. God does not use natural processes as if they existed without him. God does not take advantage of natural laws to accomplish his will as if the laws existed without him. We see immediately why the question "Can God intervene in a world ruled by orderly laws?" is meaningless. There is no world ruled by orderly laws except that one constantly maintained in existence by the activity of God (1971, p. 28).

It is because of this fact that scholar John Walton defines providence as "the way God acts through all so-called natural processes, whether in creation, nature, or history" (2001, p. 101). His addition of the adjective "so-called" highlights the fact that the laws of "nature" are perpetually dependant on the supernatural God. In the term providence, then, we see God's perpetual upholding of the entire Universe.

LORD'S TABLE

PRESIDE: Warren Davenport Irwin Thomas
ASSIST: Lewis Elliott Paul Connell
 Randy Elliott Billy Rodgers
 Stephen Ulrich Jim Woody

PRAYERS

A.M. OPENING: Raymond Pipkin
A.M. CLOSING: Ryan McAlister
P.M. OPENING: Robert Berch
P.M. CLOSING: John Manning

If you are unable to lead prayer or serve at the Lord's table, please contact Cedric Huff or Paul Connell.

RECORD, WEEK of June 19, 2016

BIBLE STUDY: 230
 A.M. WORSHIP: 325
 P.M. WORSHIP: 355
 CONTRIBUTION: \$16,274

OUR SICK

Carolyn Jones, Methodist Hospital Germantown, room 302N.

Terri Sanders, daughter of Nancy Price, Methodist University Hospital, room 645.

Kathy Worley, mother of Fritz Rickles, St. Thomas Hospital in Nashville.

Morgan Stover, 10 year old nephew of Helen Sharp, diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver.

ILL AT HOME: Corinne Elkins.

HOMEBOUND

Bessie Berry	Albert & Ruth House
Virginia Ditto	Carolyn Jones
Bertha Draughon	Clarine Justice
Hazel Eskew	Ryan McCullar
Tommy & Nell Herndon	Helen Palazola
Anita Hopper	Jerry & Betty Robbins



KIRBY PINES Retirement Community worship service each fourth Sunday 8:00-8:45 a.m., conducted by Forest Hill. Our next service will be Sunday, June 26.

LEGACY ESTATES worship service each Sunday afternoon 3:00 p.m. conducted by Forest Hill.



REMEMBER to Check Your Box!

INFORMATION LINE: 531-8849

HEARTS & HANDS

TEAM "A" (Paul Connell) will receive assignments the week of June 26.

UPCOMING EVENTS

WEDNESDAY EVENING SUMMER SERIES June 22-August 10, "New Testament Worship" in the auditorium for ages 7th grade-adult. See the schedule of speakers and weekly topics below.

**Wednesday
 2016 Summer Series
 "New Testament Worship"**

June 22	"Biblical Authority and New Testament Worship"	B. J. Clarke
July 6	"The Lord's Supper and Worship"	Don Walker
July 13	"Giving and Worship"	Billy Bland
July 20	"Worship Upon the First Day of the Week"	T. J. Clarke
July 27	"Preaching and Worship"	Bobby Liddell
August 3	"Prayer and Worship"	Keith Mosher
August 10	"Singing and Worship"	Barry Grider

FOUNDATIONS – a week of specialized training for young men and women ages 13-19. June 25-July 1.

Last week's solution:

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods. Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. Psalm 24:1-4

CORNERSTONE

Replace each letter with a different letter to reveal the scripture.

ZMH TL BZXH JMNK TXB HXBUXYQLB, NTLILPKIL X
 BZE JMNK EKJ, NZRL MK NTKJVTN PKI EKJI QXPL,
 FTZN EL BTZQQ LZN; MLXNTLI PKI NTL AKHE, FTZN
 EL BTZQQ YJN KM. NTL QXPL XB OKIL NTZM OLZN,
 ZMH NTL AKHE XB OKIL NTZM IZXOLMN. UKMBXHLI
 NTL IZGLMB PKI NTL MLXNTLI BKF MKI ILZY;
 FTXUT MLXNTLI TZGL BNKILTKJBL MKI AZIM; ZMH
 VKH PLLHLNT NTLO TKF OJUT OKIL ZIL EL ALNNLI
 NTZM NTL PKFQB?

H = D

Solution next week

J = U

God's Providence (continued from page 2)

SPECIAL PROVIDENCE

The general providence of God upholds all nature. The way the term providence is usually applied, however, refers to God's coordination of events in order to bring about specific desired outcomes. This has been referred to as God's special providence. It often is spoken of in the Bible as it is seen in the lives of those who follow him (May, 2014, p. 14). We see the difference between general and specific providence when we compare Matthew 5:45, which says that God "makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust," with Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." In one sense, all life comes from God and the fact that anyone can take a breath is a providential blessing. In another sense, God has promised that all the events in the lives of those who love Him will be orchestrated in a way that they will work together for the ultimate good.

It is important to recognize what the Bible does not say about God's providence. There is an idea that if a person is a faithful child of God, then God will make sure that he or she is always prosperous, has a wonderful spouse, is blessed with children, and lives a life of comfort and ease. That is not what the Bible says. In fact, the Bible is clear that those who love and follow God often experience serious hardships and trials. Paul told Timothy that "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). James told his readers to "count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (James 1:2-3). Peter told his readers who were suffering governmental persecution not to "think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings" (1 Peter 4:12-13). Even the Lord was disciplined in obedience by the things which He suffered (Hebrews 5:8). God does not promise that everything that happens to those who love Him will be good. Instead, He promises that they will work together so that the end result is good.

(from apologeticspress.org)

(to be continued)

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