

Our western world seems to be more and more influenced by the contradictory forces of naturalism – a belief that the world is composed solely of natural elements and forces – and mysticism or even occult practices. Understanding what the Bible teaches will keep the Christian from being blown back and forth by the claims that confront us. The Biblical teaching highlighted today is diametrically opposed to naturalism, but it also corrects many mystical and occult ideas.

I. *God's unseen decisions before creation.*

1. This teaching is generally referred to in theology as the doctrine of “decrees” or the decisions of God in regard to all things outside Himself, i.e., His total plan for all things.

2. The Bible teaches that God’s plan for the universe a) covers all things (Ephesians 1:11), b) is based upon what He wanted (Ephesians 1:5, 11; Psalm 135:6), c) is purposed for His glory (Ephesians 1:6, 12), d) does not change (Ephesians 3:11; James 1:17), and e) includes both what He does directly and events which He permits.

God is holy, so His plan and action are holy. He is sovereign, but never-the-less His plan permits evil. God’s good plan which permissively includes evil is illustrated in the selling of Joseph into slavery, whose “meant it for evil, but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20).

3. Understanding this teaching is essential for a healthy Christian life because a) it gives confidence and assurance in the Christian life (cf. Acts 4:23-28), b) it encourages the believer to keep on striving because God is at work in his/her life (Philippians 2:12-13), and c) it gives purpose to life, which chance or randomness cannot do.

II. *God's continuing unseen works today.*

1. This work is generally referred to as preservation and providence, which is God’s work to assure that what He decided (or planned) actually happens.

2. The Bible teaches that this work of God a) includes the physical universe and all “natural laws” (Colossians 1:16-17), b) includes man (Acts 17:28) and the unseen spirit world as well, and c) may involve direct, miraculous intervention (such as the miracles reported in the Bible), or it may involve indirect intervention through nature or through people (Acts 3:18 says God fulfilled what He foretold about the crucifixion through ignorant people), and d) can take the form of permission, limitation, prevention, or causation.

3. This teaching is an essential continuation to the teaching about God’s plan because it gives the confidence and assurance in life that the good which God has planned for those who are His, is being accomplished (Romans 8:28; Philippians 1:6).

This continued work of God is one which we must correctly understand and carefully communicate. It never removes man’s responsibility. It does not allow us to interpret disaster as God’s judgment (cf. Luke 13:1-5). Although God has good reasons, we may never know them and should be cautious about suggesting to others what they are.

III. *God and the unseen world around us.*

1. According to the Bible there exists an unseen world inhabited by spirit beings which we can accurately understand only from the Bible. It is not neutral, but either good or evil, i.e., in opposition to God. These spirit beings are generally called angels, demons or evil spirits, and one specific being, Satan.

2. From Scripture we can deduce the following:

a) All of these beings were part of God’s good creation (Colossians 1:16; Mark 12:25; Exodus 20:11; Genesis 1:31).

b) Evil spirit beings, including Satan, were originally good angels who rebelled. Some are bound (2 Peter 2:4), others are free. Apparently as many as a third of all angels will eventually have rebelled (Revelation 12). This are the evil spiritual forces against which the believer struggles (Ephesians 6:12).

c) All of these spirit beings, however, must submit to God’s authority (cf. Hebrews 1:7, 14; Job 1-2; 1 John 4:4).

3. The following are a few of the important applications to our lives.

a) It is wrong to worship spirit beings. The worship of idols is really worshiping the evil spirits behind them (1 Co 10:19-20). Awe of angels or fear of demons can move people to respond wrongly in worship (cf. Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9). Some with “unspiritual minds” filled up with “empty notions” delighted in the worship of angels (Colossians 2:18, 19). The defense or remedy is to stay connected to Christ.

b) Although spirit-beings, both good angels and evil spirits, are powerful beings, do not overestimate their power nor become pre-occupied with them. “The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” (1 John 4:4) God is faithful in limiting and providing a way to bear all temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13). God has given us spiritual armor to be able to stand against evil spiritual forces (Ephesians 6:10ff).

c) Do not underestimate or ignore the spirit world. Satan seeks to attack believers but we are to resist (1 Peter 5:8-9). We should know his schemes or tactics that we not be outwitted (2 Corinthians 2:11). Beware of Satan’s deceptions (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). Remember that even good angels are watching and learning from us (Ephesians 3:10; 1 Corinthians 11:10; 1 Peter 1:12).

Just because we do not see something, does not mean it does not exist. There is an unseen spirit world. God has supernaturally worked and is working to accomplish His plans. A Biblical world view accepts the Biblical revelation about things unseen. It can make the difference between hope and despair, action versus fatalism, truth and deception. It will distinguish the follower of Jesus Christ from all others and bring praise to His glory.