



## ***Random Thoughts, Vol. 2***

**by Jim Osman**  
Pastor/Teacher

**Kootenai Community Church**  
[kootenaichurch.org](http://kootenaichurch.org)

Apparently one volume did not exhaust my supply of “random thoughts,” so a second one is in order. The following are thoughts that have crossed my mind over the period of the last nine months.

### **The Hand of Providence**

I have from time to time been accused of having a view of God's involvement in the lives of His children which is “distant and removed,” not “intimate and involved.” This charge usually gets leveled because I don't believe that God speaks to His children through signs, nudgings, promptings and still small voices. I do believe that God leads and directs His children through His Word, coupled with His providential governance of His whole creation.

Quite the opposite of “distant and uninvolved,” the biblical notion of providence is that God is *intimately involved* in everything that happens, down to the weather, the changing of a stoplight, and all things that seem to us to be coincidental and incidental.

Let me offer a recent example. Last night, just before bed, when it was well dark outside, I remembered that I had to go turn off two sprinklers. One valve that I had to turn was right at the end of my house next to a transplanted huckleberry bush (which has survived now for almost a year). On the way out the door, I thought to myself, “I should grab a little flashlight this time.”

*“I have not taken a flashlight with me on any after-dark excursion to the faucet so far this summer, so why this time?”* I reasoned, trying to talk myself out of it.

*“Just grab that little LED flashlight by the front door.”*

*“But I can walk in the dark, just like I have every*

*other night.”* On and on the discussion went inside my head as I laced up my shoes.

So I grabbed the light, a ballcap-mounted LED flashlight belonging to one of the kids.

I stepped out the door and fiddled with the flashlight to find the on/off switch while I walked carelessly into the dark. I wandered toward the faucet, thinking to myself, “I should have just left this stupid thing in the house. I'll have the water turned off by the time I figure out how to turn this crazy thing on.”

Then it clicked on, and in the perimeter of the lighted area in front of me, I saw something move off to my left up against the house. I froze in my tracks, startled at first, then I suspected that it was the neighbor's cat wandering around, as he has started to do lately. I shined the light over at the base of my huckleberry plant, and there, not more than six feet away, was a big black tail with a wide white stripe right down the center of it, sticking up next to the faucet.

One hundredth of a second later, I was standing inside my house, hyper-ventilating, shaking as if I had seen a Sasquatch. I thanked God for His providence.

Now, indulge me in a little retrospective analysis, will you? Why did I think about a flashlight, this night of all nights? Had I not grabbed the light, had it not come on when it did, I would have found myself at my outdoor faucet standing on a skunk!

Did God “tell me” to take the flashlight? I wouldn't say that. I would say that, by God's providence, I decided this night to take a flashlight. It came on at just the right time, and all things worked together to save me from a skunk.

Now, what if I had been sprayed? Well, obviously, then I would stink. In that case I would still believe that God was working all things out for my good and His glory, even those things which don't *seem* to me to be *good* from my limited perspective.

As it works out, I have been given just another example of how intimately involved God is in my life through His providence. Not by whispering in my ear, not through special revelation, but by providentially directing my steps and my thoughts, even when I am not at all aware of His working!

I didn't hear from God, and I didn't need to, in order for Him to direct my steps and be intimately involved in my life. His providence is active all around me, even when I am oblivious to it. He does, and is doing, the same for you. Look for His providential dealings. You will see them everywhere.

The faith which sees God's hand in **all** of life's details is *certainly not a lesser faith* than the faith which can only see God's hand in miracles and the supernatural.

### The Good of Writing

Time for a confession, though I am sure that this will not come as a surprise to many, if any, of you. I have never fancied myself a *good* writer. I am much better in crafting spoken words from the hip than I am in putting thoughts on paper. I never look forward to writing papers, newsletter articles, sermons, thank-you cards, or even a note. There is something about putting my thoughts on paper that terrifies me. But I also know that it is something that I have to discipline and force myself to do.

When we first started our church newsletter a number of years ago, I could easily have opted out of a monthly column and just allowed the newsletter to become a glorified "bulletin." However, I felt that the discipline of writing a monthly column would force me to do that which I did not want to do, but felt was a necessary discipline.

Forcing yourself to write your thoughts out in a clear manner can only improve your thinking and communicating abilities. I have to agree with Francis Bacon, who said, "Reading maketh a full man, conference [speaking] a ready man, and writing an exact man."

Writing will do you good. I think it has helped me. I don't think my writing is necessarily "good," but I benefit from the process, even if no one else does. It is laborious for me and a burdensome task, but I enjoy the feeling of having the finished product.

Augustine wrote, "I am the sort of man who writes because he has made progress, and who makes progress by writing" (*Epistle* 143.2-3). That is good counsel.

### The Goodness of God

Have you ever stopped to ponder the goodness of God that is displayed in His creation? I was thinking about this the other day while I was eating an apple off my apple tree.

God didn't have to create all the different types of fruit and vegetables that He did. He could have created a world in which everything we ate, no matter what it was or how it was cooked, had the same flavor. Or He could have created a world filled with flavor, but not given us taste buds, so that everything we ate tasted the same-- like nothing. Or God could have created a world without any diversity of fruit and vegetable in which the only edible thing was some tasteless plant that contained all that our bodies would need for sustenance.

Instead, God created an amazing diversity of foods, amazing diversity of flavor, and then gave us the ability to enjoy both. Isn't that good of Him! He didn't owe us that. Food given for our sustenance alone did not have to have flavor in order to sustain us. He could have given us sustenance without flavor. Yet the food that sustains is also amazingly flavorful and enjoyable to eat. What a **good** God.

Not only is there an amazing diversity of foods (tomatoes, potatoes, squash, broccoli, cabbage, asparagus, apples, grapefruit, etc.), but there is an amazing diversity of flavors and types within each of those. There are red potatoes, white potatoes, and yellow potatoes, even blue potatoes. There are dozens of varieties of tomatoes, many with their own very distinct flavor.

Enter the apple that I mentioned earlier. It was a Transparent. I get to enjoy Transparent apples in August, a different variety in September, and Granny Smith in early October. Isn't God good to provide so

many different types and flavors of apples? All that variety was present in the original created *kind* of Genesis 1. What an amazing, wise, and **good** God we serve!

### **Gospel Slogans**

I have long been vocal against using phrases like “ask Jesus into your heart,” “accept Christ,” and “make a decision for Jesus” when presenting the gospel. These phrases have **no** precedent in Scripture and tend to cloud the message of the gospel rather than clarify it.

What verse speaks of “asking Jesus into your heart?” There is not one. I don't know how this unhelpful jargon got introduced into the Christian vernacular, but we should work overtime to make it extinct. You don't read of the apostles ever instructing people to “ask Jesus into their heart.”

Nor do we read of them encouraging people to “accept Christ.” The gospel message contains no command or instruction on accepting Christ. In salvation, we do not accept Christ; He must accept us. We are the ones which depend on His acceptance for eternal life. We are the ones which are unacceptable before a Holy God. We have to be made to be acceptable. We need Jesus to accept us into His Heaven. How does that happen? It happens when the sinner turns from His rebellion against God and casts Himself on the mercy of God for forgiveness and salvation.

The Bible uses the words “repentance” and “faith.” Paul's gospel proclamation consisted of “testifying to both Jews and Greeks of **repentance** toward God and **faith** in our Lord Jesus Christ” (**Acts 20:21**). Why not just use the biblical language for the biblical gospel? Do we think we can do better than God? Can we improve upon God's jargon?

Charles Spurgeon noticed the same tendency in his day (1890) to move away from using biblical language toward using a new style of exhortations in gospel presentations in hopes of getting a better response from the hearers. Spurgeon warned, “*The gospel is, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.' If we think we shall do more good by substituting another exhortation for the gospel*

*command, we shall find ourselves landed in serious difficulties. If, for a moment, our improvements seem to produce a larger result than the old gospel, it will be the growth of mushrooms, it may even be growth of toadstools; but it is not the growth of trees of the Lord.”*<sup>1</sup>

Can we really improve on what God has commanded? I am convinced that we are reaping the fruit of such careless gospel exhortations even now. Generations have grown up “accepting Christ,” “asking Jesus into their heart,” “and making a decision” and have never repented of their sin and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. The result? Millions of false converts dot the evangelical landscape, thinking they are saved because they asked Jesus into their heart and were baptized, yet they have never been truly regenerated. Let us heed Spurgeon's warning and not presume to improve upon God's wording. When sharing the biblical Gospel, use biblical language to communicate biblical truth. “Repentance” and “faith” are the words that God uses. Once we have deviated from His gospel commands, we have deviated from the saving gospel itself (**Gal. 1:6-9**).

### **Super Bowl XLIV**

It is no secret that I enjoy watching football. I always enjoy watching the Super Bowl, even though it may not feature any teams for which I can cheer. I don't ever watch the game just for the commercials. I watch the game for the game. I will be watching the Super Bowl this weekend (February 7, 2010) and cheering for the Colts over the Saints. I know that by the time this is read, the result will be “ancient history.”

Something I heard on a radio program got me pondering a question: “Does God **care** who wins the Super Bowl?” Related to that question is another: “Has God **predestined** the winner of the Super Bowl?” That question occasions yet *another*: “Does God **know** who will win the Super Bowl?” Please understand, I don't intend to make light of either the Super Bowl or the theological issues which I have raised. These questions bring us back to issues which intersect with our lives moment by moment, day by day, in areas far greater in significance than a sporting event. So let's

<sup>1</sup> *The Forgotten Spurgeon* by Iain Murray (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), pg. 95.

use the issue of this weekend's game to remind ourselves of some important theological truths.

We'll deal with the last question first: **“Does God know who will win the Super Bowl?”** The only orthodox answer to that question is an unqualified “yes.” Absolutely, He does. There is no uncertainty about God's knowledge concerning the outcome of the game. His knowledge of all future events is full, perfect, and infallible. God not only knows, but He knows infallibly what will come to pass.<sup>2</sup> And He not only knows the outcome of the game, but He knows what the final score will be, how many yards will be made by both teams, who will be injured and who will not be injured, who will play and who will sit on the bench and who will be the MVP. He knows exactly how many people will attend the game, what car they will drive to get there, what time they will leave their house, what shirt they will wear, and even what time they will arrive at home that night. In other words, God knows all the details that surround all the details which are in any way connected with this game.

Now, whether you believe that God knows the outcome of Sunday's game because He has predetermined it (actively knows it), or because He merely has the ability to prognosticate perfectly and He has already observed what is going to happen (passively knows it), you are still left with the reality that God **must** know it *infallibly*. In other words, God's knowledge cannot be in error.

It cannot be that God will be in any way surprised by the outcome of Sunday's game. Nor can He know the outcome and be wrong. If God knows that the Colts will win, then there is no possibility that the Colts will not win. If God knows that the Colts will win and then the Saints end up winning, then God was wrong, His knowledge was incomplete, in error, and He has some defect in Himself. Whatever God knows will come to pass, must come to pass. Otherwise, He didn't truly know it. He only “wished” it, “hoped” it, or thought it might come to pass. Whatever God knows, He knows

infallibly.

Further, whatever God knows, He has **always** known. He not only knows the outcome of Sunday's game, but He has known it from eternity past. There was never a time when He did not know it and had to learn it or discover it. No one has been God's instructor, and at no point has God learned anything. If God had to learn some piece of knowledge, then there was a time when His knowledge was incomplete and imperfect, which means He was in some way, at some point, imperfect and ignorant of certain things.

Some try to resist this, but the only way out is to in some way deny the perfection of God's omniscience. Then you end up with a God of partial knowledge, partial wisdom, who may end up acting on what He *thinks* to be best for you in the future, but He can't *know* for sure, because He is still in the process of learning. That is no God at all. It certainly is not the God of the Bible.

So what God knows, He knows infallibly and from all eternity. His knowledge cannot be shown to be in error. Therefore what God knows will come to pass, must come to pass and cannot possibly fail to come to pass.

That brings us back to our second question: **“Has God predetermined the outcome of the Super Bowl?”** If God's knowledge of future events is infallible and fixed, then it seems to me that the events of which He has that knowledge are likewise fixed. In short, the team that God knows is going to win **is going to win**.

I believe that God, by His providence and sovereignty, is working all things after the counsel of His own will for our good and His glory (**Romans 8:28ff; Ephesians 1**).

I will return to this in a moment, but for the time being, let's answer the first question: **“Does God care who wins the Super Bowl?”** I know that the default answer for a football fan reading this is, “Only when my team is playing in it. And of course, if my team wins, God got His way, and if they lose, then His will was somehow thwarted by evil referees.”

Our knee-jerk answer to that question is to say, “Well, of course God doesn't care who wins the Super Bowl. It is only a game. He has bigger concerns than who wins a game.” But hold on a second! If God is providentially directing all things for His glory and our

<sup>2</sup> The open theist would argue that God does not know the future, that the future is open to God and He will be just as surprised and excited by the game this Sunday as we are, as He anxiously awaits the outcome. If that is your view of God, you worship an idol. End of discussion. I have written an extensive series of articles on “Open Theism” available at our website: [kootenaichurch.org](http://kootenaichurch.org).

good, then how can He be unconcerned with any detail of human history?

The outcome of the Super Bowl has potential ramifications upon thousands of lives. There are implications for fans, for broadcasters, for players, for every person attending the event and watching the event, even potentially for people who are unaware of the event.

Let's say that the Saints win. That win will bring commerce and business to the city of New Orleans for the coming year. That added business revenue could end up saving the job of the Christian business man whose business is teetering on the brink of failure. He will be hired to print banners for the different events. The saving of that job and business could be the thing that saves the marriage for that particular couple, or other couples that work for that Christian employer.

Or perhaps God wants one of the Christian Saints players to have a venue to share his testimony on TV, radio, or at some event he attends.

Does God care which team wins the Super Bowl? Absolutely. The team that God wants to win will be the team whose winning will bring the most glory to Him and the most good to His elect (**Romans 8: 28-30**). Whatever the outcome of the game, it will be that which most glorifies God. He does not leave anything to chance. He is not unconcerned with any detail of anyone's life. How can He be unconcerned with a detail that affects millions of lives?

If He doesn't care about the Super Bowl and all of the thousands or millions of implications that come out of it, how can you think that He would be concerned with the much, much, much smaller details of your life? You are only one person!

God is directing history, all of it, the big events and the small events, for His glory! That is the big idea of the book of Daniel. God is sovereign and He is King and He will be glorified by all of human history. He is intimately involved in the rise and fall of nations. He is intimately involved in caring for me, even knowing the number of the hairs on my head. He is intimately concerned with all things between.

And so, we can rest in a God who knows the future infallibly and who has promised that all that comes to pass will be for our good and His glory.

I am just thankful that, five times, God has been glorified by my team winning the Super Bowl! And that was definitely for my good.

### **Spurgeon On Looking To Christ**

Where do thoughts of doubt and lack of assurance come from? One thing that can often cause us to lack assurance of our salvation is an overemphasis on and focus upon our own feelings, abilities, holiness, and progress in the faith. Self-examination is appropriate (**2 Cor. 13:5**), but our progress in the faith, our own merits, our own deeds and abilities must never become the ground of our confidence or assurance. I ran across this quote from Spurgeon:

*"Remember, sinner, it is not thy hold of Christ that saves thee--it is Christ; it is not thy joy in Christ that saves thee--it is Christ; it is not even faith in Christ, though that is the instrument--it is Christ's blood and merits; therefore, look not to thy hope, but to Christ, the source of thy hope; look not to thy faith, but to Christ, the author and finisher of thy faith; and if thou doest that, ten thousand devils cannot throw thee down. . . . There is one thing which we all of us too much becloud in our preaching, though I believe we do it very unintentionally- -namely, the great truth that it is not prayer, it is not faith, it is not our doings, it is not our feelings upon which we must rest, but upon Christ, and on Christ alone. We are apt to think that we are not in a right state, that we do not feel enough, instead of remembering that our business is not with self, but Christ. Let me beseech thee, look only to Christ; never expect deliverance from self, from ministers, or from any means of any kind apart from Christ; keep thine eye simply on Him; let His death, His agonies, His groans, His sufferings, His merits, His glories, His intercession, be fresh upon thy mind; when thou wakest in the morning look for Him; when thou liest down at night look for Him."*

Without Wax -

