

Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 256

PROVIDENCE

*Alleluia: for the Lord God
omnipotent reigneth.*

Revelation 19:6

Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

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PROVIDENCE

256

Contents

Creation & Providence.....	3
<i>Benjamin Beddome (1717-1795)</i>	
Defining Providence.....	7
<i>David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)</i>	
The Godhood of God.....	10
<i>Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)</i>	
The Properties of Providence.....	15
<i>William S. Plumer (1802-1880)</i>	
God Rules Everything.....	20
<i>Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)</i>	
God's Providence Applied.....	28
<i>Joel R. Beeke</i>	
All Things Work for Good.....	35
<i>Thomas Watson (1620-1686)</i>	
Providence & Conversion.....	42
<i>John Flavel (c. 1630-1691)</i>	
The Lord God Omnipotent.....	47
<i>Thomas Reade (1776-1841)</i>	

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CREATION & PROVIDENCE

Benjamin Beddome (1717-1795)

WHAT is the work of creation? The work of creation is God's making all things of nothing, by the word of His power, in the space of six days, and all very good.

Did God create the world? Yes. "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands" (Heb 1:10). And all things in it? Yes. "God...made the world and all things therein" (Act 17:24). Did He create the soul of man? Yes. "Which...formeth the spirit of man within him" (Zec 12:1). And the body of man? Yes. "In thy book all my members were written" (Psa 139:16). Did He create the highest angels? Yes. "By him were all things created...whether they be thrones," etc. (Col 1:16). And the meanest insects? Yes. "God made...every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind" (Gen 1:25). And did omniscience¹ approve what omnipotence² wrought? Yes. "God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Gen 1:31).

Did God need any assistance in His work? No. "Who hath prevented³ me, that I should repay him?" (Job 41:11).⁴ Did He make all things out of nothing? Yes. For the "things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Heb 11:3). And by His word? Yes. He said, "Let there be light: and there was light" (Gen 1:3). And in six days? Yes. "In six days the LORD made heaven and earth" (Exo 20:11). Did He appoint every creature its proper station and use? Yes. "Let there be lights in the firmament...and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years" (Gen 1:14). Does God go on to create? No. "On the seventh day God...rested...from all his work" (Gen 2:2).

How did God create man? God created man male and female after His own image—in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness—with dominion over the creatures.

Were there any men before Adam? No. He was "the first man" (1Co 15:45). Are all men then derived from Adam? Yes. He "hath made of one blood all nations of men" (Act 17:26). And did Adam himself derive

¹ **omniscience** – state of having infinite knowledge; knowing everything.

² **omnipotence** – state of having unlimited power; having all power.

³ **prevented** – gone before.

⁴ This appears to mean, "Who has first given Me [God] anything that I need to pay it back?"

his being from God? Yes. "...which was the son of God" (Luk 3:38).

Did God create man male and female? Yes. "Male and female, created he them" (Gen 5:2). Was there a difference in the manner of their creation? Yes. "For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man" (1Co 11:8). And in the order of their creation? Yes. "For Adam was first formed, then Eve" (1Ti 2:13). And in the end of their creation? Yes. "Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man" (1Co 11:9).

Was man made after the image of God? Yes. "God created man in his own image" (Gen 1:27). Did that image consist in knowledge? Yes. "...which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Col 3:10). And in righteousness and holiness? Yes. For the "new man...after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph 4:24). And in authority and government? Yes. For "thou hast put all things under his feet" (Psa 8:6). Was this state of man a very glorious one? Yes. "Thou...hast crowned him with glory and honour" (Psa 8:5). But was it an abiding one? No. For "man being in honour abideth not" (Psa 49:12).

What are God's works of providence? God's works of providence are His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures, and all their actions.

Is God's providence universal? Yes. "His kingdom ruleth over all" (Psa 103:19). Does it extend to all worlds? Yes. "Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth" (Psa 135:6). And to all creatures? Yes. He upholdeth "all things by the word of his power" (Heb 1:3). Does it extend to inanimate creatures? Yes. He "bind[s] the sweet influences of the Pleiades, [and] loose[s] the bands of Orion" (Job 38:31). And to the animal creation? Yes. "The stork...knoweth her appointed times" (Jer 8:7). Does it order all events relative to particular persons? Yes. Man's "days are determined, the number of his months are with [God]" (Job 14:5). And to kingdoms and societies of men? Yes. "He changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings" (Dan 2:21). Doth God exercise a special providence over some places? Yes. Thus, Canaan was "a land which...God cared for" (Deu 11:12). And over some persons? Yes. He "is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe" (1Ti 4:10). Is it a desirable thing to be interested in God's special providence? Yes. "Remember me, O LORD, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people" (Psa 106:4).

Doth God's providence extend to all actions? Yes. "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps" (Pro 16:9). Doth

it extend to all natural actions? Yes. "In him we live, and move" (Act 17:28). And to all fortuitous actions? Yes. Thus "a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness" (1Ki 22:34). And to all good actions? Yes. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD" (Psa 37:23). And to evil actions? Yes. "It was not you that sent me hither, but God" (Gen 45:8). And can God bring good out of evil? Yes. "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good" (Gen 50:20). Are God's providences mysterious? Yes. His "judgments are a great deep" (Psa 36:6). But are they harmonious? Yes. They "work together" (Rom 8:28).

Is preservation an act of providence? Yes. "Which holdeth our soul in life" (Psa 66:9). Did God preserve us in our infant state? Yes. "Thou art my God from my mother's belly" (Psa 22:10). And will He preserve us in declining years? Yes. "...to hoar hairs will I carry you" (Isa 46:4). Doth He give us food? Yes. He filleth "our hearts with food and gladness" (Act 14:17). And rest? Yes. "He giveth his beloved sleep" (Psa 127:2). Doth He preserve us from threatening dangers? Yes. "He keepeth all [our] bones" (Psa 34:20). And endow us with wisdom for our several trades? Yes. Bezaleel and Aholiab were "filled...with the Spirit of God...in all manner of workmanship" (Exo 35:31). Does God's care extend to the meanest creatures? Yes. Not a sparrow "shall fall on the ground without your Father" (Mat 10:29).

Is government also an act of providence? Yes. God "ruleth by his power for ever" (Psa 66:7). Doth God maintain the laws and ordinances of nature? Yes. Thus, we read of His "covenant of the day, and [His] covenant of the night" (Jer 33:20). But doth He sometimes suspend and act contrary to them? Yes. "So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day" (Jos 10:13). Doth He uphold all creatures in their operations? Yes. The eagle mounteth up at His command, and maketh her nest on high (Job 39:27). But can He also restrain those operations? Yes. He "shut the lions' mouths" (Dan 6:22). Doth He exercise a peculiar government over the church? Yes. "God ruleth in Jacob" (Psa 59:13).

Is God's government supreme? Yes. He is "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev 19:16). Is it just and rightful? Yes. "Thine is the kingdom, O LORD" (1Ch 29:11). Is it most wise? Yes. "How unsearchable are his judgments" (Rom 11:33). Is it holy? Yes. "The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works" (Psa 145:17). Is it absolute and arbitrary? Yes. "Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters" (Job 33:13). Is it

effectual and uncontrollable? Yes. “What his soul desireth...that he doeth” (Job 23:13).

Is God’s providential government an argument for trust and confidence? Yes. “Commit thy way unto the LORD” (Psa 37:5). And for silence and submission? Yes. “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psa 46:10). And for praise and thanksgiving? Yes. “Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth” (Rev 19:6).

What special act of providence did God exercise towards man in the estate wherein he was created? When God had created man, He entered a covenant of life with him upon condition of perfect obedience—forbidding him to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon pain of death.

Did God make man perfectly holy? Yes. “God...made man upright” (Ecc 7:29). And perfectly happy? Yes. For He “blessed them” (Gen 1:28). Did He give him a law? Yes. “The LORD God commanded the man” (Gen 2:16). And was man as God’s creature obliged to obey that law? Yes. “Remember...O...Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee” (Isa 44:21).

Was the covenant that God entered with Adam a covenant of life? Yes. For “the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them” (Gal 3:12). Was there a special command given him by way of trial? Yes. “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat” (Gen 2:17).

And was death threatened in case of disobedience? Yes. “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen 2:17). Was he under any natural necessity to break this law? No. For “of every [other] tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat” (Gen 2:16).

Was this covenant made with Adam as a public head? Yes. For he was “the figure of him that was to come” (Rom 5:14). Was Eve included in it? Yes. For “God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done?” (Gen 3:13). Was this law worthy of God? Yes. “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen 18:25). Is the second covenant better than the first? Yes. For Christ “is the mediator of a better covenant” (Heb 8:6).

From *A Scriptural Exposition of the Baptist Catechism*, in the public domain.

Benjamin Beddome (1717-1795): English Baptist minister, hymn writer, and author; born in Henley-in-Arden, Warwickshire, England, UK.



DEFINING PROVIDENCE

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

WHAT exactly do we mean by providence? I cannot think of a better definition or description than this: Providence is “that continued exercise of the divine energy whereby the Creator preserves all His creatures, is operative in all that comes to pass in the world, and directs all things to their appointed end.”¹ We shall consider the biblical proof for that statement later.

There are three elements in this idea of providence, and we must differentiate between them in thought as well as in practice, though, of course, the three tend to work together. You can look at the three aspects of providence from different angles.

The first is the *aspect or the element of preservation*: “that continuous agency of God by which He maintains in existence the things He has created, together with the properties and powers with which He has endowed them.”² Now, this is most important. The Bible teaches that God preserves everything that He has made. It is a continuous work. Some have tried to say that this doctrine of preservation simply means that God does not destroy the work He once made, but that is not preservation. It means more than that... We will put it like this: everything that has been created by God has a real and permanent existence of its own, apart from the being of God, but that must never be taken to mean that it is self-existent, which belongs to God alone. If things were self-existent, they would not need God to keep going. That is the difference. God has created a thing, and He keeps it alive. He upholds all things, and they continue to exist as the result of a positive and continued exercise of His divine power.

Notice how Psalm 104 puts it in verses 28-30: “That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good. Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth.” Now, God does not create these animals of the earth constantly. What He does is to keep

¹ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1938), 166.

² Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 410.

life, to preserve what He has already created. Paul, of course, puts this exactly in Acts 17:28: “For in him we live, and move, and have our being.” He means the same thing in Colossians 1:17: “And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.” They are preserved, they are kept going by Him. It is stated still more strikingly in Hebrews 1:3: “upholding all things by the word of his power.” He has not only made them, He upholds them. There is nothing in the universe that would continue to go forward if God were not upholding it. We must never think, therefore, of the universe as something that God created and then allowed to work itself out—that is deism.

Second, there is the governmental aspect of providence. This means the continued activity of God whereby He rules all things to a definite end and object and does so to secure the accomplishment of His own divine purpose. “The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice” (Psa 97:1). He is the King of the universe. He is the Lord of lords. Everything is under His control: “His kingdom ruleth over all” (Psa 103:19). “The nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance” (Isa 40:15). That is the idea of government. Or take the mighty statement in Daniel 4:34-35: “And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?”

The governmental aspect of the doctrine of the providence of God is of vital importance and runs through the Bible from the beginning to the end. “His purposes shall ripen fast, unfolding every hour,” says William Cowper.³ There is an end to this creation, a purpose, an object. Everything is leading up to God’s determined purpose for it.

The third aspect of providence that I must emphasize is what has generally been called *the aspect of concurrence*. It means “the cooperation of the divine power with all subordinate powers, according to the preestablished laws of their operation, causing them to act and to act precisely as they do.”⁴ If you like, it means the whole idea of the relationship of second causes to God’s ordering of all things. The Bible teaching is that God works in and through the second causes that He

³ William Cowper (1731-1800) – pronounced *Cooper*; English poet and hymn-writer.

⁴ Berkhof, 171.

has made. We are all clear, I take it, about secondary causes. We find, do we not, that everything that happens has a cause; certain things lead to certain other things. You see that right through the whole of nature. One thing produces another. Now, those are the second causes, and the biblical doctrine of providence teaches the existence of second causes. But it is very, very clear in its emphasis that the second causes do not operate automatically or independently. God works through them. They have their own operations, but God is over all these operations.

Now, it is important to emphasize this point because so many people today speak of the powers of nature as if they were something independent. But they are not. There are powers and laws in nature, but not apart from God. God is in direct relationship to them, uses them, orders them, and manipulates them; so, we hold the two ideas at one and the same time—the reality of secondary causes, but their dependence upon God and His control of them.

This is a mystery, of course. This is the difficult aspect of this doctrine—how can these things be true at one and the same time? But the Scriptures teach it. You will find it in Psalm 104:20-21 and 30. Amos 3:6 says, “Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?” Matthew 5:45 tells us, “For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” In other words, these things do not happen automatically as the result of the secondary causes or laws of nature. God is behind them. He is working in them and through them. He is not divorced from them.

So there, briefly, are the three aspects of providence. You can think of them like this: the idea of preservation makes us think of the being of everything that is. The idea of government tells us that this being is guided, and the doctrine of concurrence tells us about how the activity is guided. Being, guidance, and activity.

From *Great Doctrines of the Bible, Vol. 1: God the Father, God the Son*
(Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 140-142.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981): Welsh expository preacher and author; born in Cardiff, Wales, UK.



Ah, my reader, this is the first great lesson we must learn: that God is the Creator, we the creature; that He is the Potter, we the clay. This is the harvest of all life's lessons; and when we think we have learned them, we soon discover that we have need to re-learn them.

—Arthur W. Pink

THE GODHOOD OF GOD

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

THE Godhood of God! What is meant by this expression? Ah, sad it is that such a question needs to be asked and answered. And yet it does: for a generation has arisen that is well-nigh universally ignorant of the important truth that this term connotes.¹ That which is popular today in the colleges, in the pulpits, and in the press, is the dignity, the power, and the attainments of *man*. But this is only the corrupt fruit that has issued from the evolutionary teachings of [more than 150] years ago. When Christian theologians (?) accepted the Darwinian hypothesis, which *excluded* God from the realm of creation, it was only to be expected that more and more God would be *banished* from the realm of human affairs. Thus it has proven. To the [twenty-first] century mind, God is little more than an abstraction, an impersonal “First Cause”; or if a being at all, one far removed from this world and having little or nothing to do with mundane² affairs. Man, forsooth,³ is a “god” unto himself. He is a “free agent” and therefore the regulator of his own life and the determiner of his own destiny. Such was the devil’s lie at the beginning—“Ye shall be as gods” (Gen 3:5). But from human speculation and Satanic insinuation, we turn to divine revelation.

The Godhood of God! What is meant by the expression? This: the omnipotence of God, the absolute sovereignty of God. When we speak of the Godhood of God, we affirm that God *is* God. We affirm that God is something more than an empty title; that God is something more than a mere figurehead; that God is something more than a far distant spectator, looking helplessly on at the suffering that sin has wrought. When we speak of the Godhood of God, we affirm that He *is* “King of kings and Lord of lords” (1Ti 6:15). We affirm that God is something more than a disappointed, dissatisfied, defeated being, who is filled with benevolent desires but lacking in power to carry them out. When we speak of the Godhood of God, we affirm that He is “the most High” (Act 7:48). We affirm that God is something more than one who has endowed man with the power of choice and because he has done this is therefore *unable to compel* man to do his bidding. We affirm that God

¹ **connotes** – implies; suggests.

² **mundane** – of this earthly world rather than a heavenly or spiritual one.

³ **forsooth** – in truth, in fact.

is something more than one who has waged a protracted⁴ war with the devil and has been *worsted*. When we speak of the Godhood of God, we affirm that He is the *Almighty*.

To speak of the Godhood of God, then, is to say that God is *on the throne*, on the throne as a *fact* and not as a *say so*; on a throne that is high above all. To speak of the Godhood of God is to say that the helm is in *His hand* and that He is steering according to His own good pleasure. To speak of the Godhood of God is to say that He is the *Potter*, that we are the clay, and that out of the clay He shapes one as a vessel to honor and another as a vessel to dishonor according to His own sovereign rights (Rom 9:21). [It is] to speak of the *Divine Despot*⁵ doing “according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and *none* can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan 4:35). Therefore, to speak of the Godhood of God is to give the mighty Creator His rightful place; it is to recognize His exalted majesty; it is to own His universal scepter.

The Godhood of God stands at the base of divine revelation: “In the beginning God” (Gen 1:1)—in solemn majesty, eternal, uncaused, self-sufficient. This is the *foundation* doctrine, and upon it all other doctrines *must* be built, and any other doctrine that is not built upon it will inevitably fail and fall in the day of testing. At the beginning of all true theology lies the postulate⁶ that God is God—absolute and irresistible. It must be so. Without this, we face a closed door; with it, we have a key that unlocks every mystery. This is true of creation: exclude an almighty God, and nothing is left but blind and illogical materialism.⁷ This is true of revelation: the Bible is the solitary miracle in the realm of literature. Exclude God from it, and you have a miracle and no miracle-worker to produce it. This is true of salvation. “Salvation is of the LORD” (Jon 2:9), entirely so; exclude God from any aspect or part of salvation, and salvation vanishes. This is true of history, for history is *His* story: it is the outworking in time of His eternal purpose. Exclude God from history, and all is meaningless and purposeless. The absolute Godhood of God is the *only* guaranty that in the end, it shall be fully and finally demonstrated that God is “all in all” (1Co 15:28).

“In the beginning *God*.” This is not only the first word of Holy Scripture, but it must be the firm axiom⁸ of all true philosophy—the

⁴ **protracted** – lasting a long time.

⁵ **despot** – ruler who holds absolute power, sometimes in cruelty or oppression.

⁶ **postulate** – proposition that is accepted as true to provide a basis for logical reasoning.

⁷ **materialism** – philosophical doctrine that matter is the only reality.

⁸ **axiom** – established or generally accepted principle.

philosophy of human history, for example. Instead of beginning with man and his world and attempting to reason back to God, we must begin with God and reason forward to man and his world. It is failure to do this that leaves unsolved the “riddle of the universe.” Begin with the world as it is today and try to reason back to God, and what is the result? If you are honest of heart and logical of mind, [it is] this: that God has little or nothing at all to do with the world. But begin with God and reason forward to the world as it is today, and much light is cast on the problem. Because God is *holy*, His anger burns against sin. Because God is *righteous*, His judgments fall on those who rebel against Him. Because God is *faithful*, the solemn threatenings of His Word are being fulfilled. Because God is *omnipotent*, no problem can master Him, no enemy can defeat Him, and no purpose of His can be withstood. It is just because God is Who He is and what He is that we now behold what we do—the gathering clouds of the storm of divine wrath that will shortly burst upon the earth.

“For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things” (Rom 11:36). In the beginning—God. In the center—God. At the end—God. But as soon as this is insisted upon, men will stand up and tell you what *they* think about God. They will prate⁹ about God working consistently with His own character, as though a worm of the earth could determine what was consistent and what was inconsistent with the divine perfections. People will say with an air of profound wisdom that God must deal justly with His creatures, which is true, of course, but who is able to define *divine* justice or any other of God’s attributes? The truth is that man is utterly incompetent for forming a proper estimate of God’s character and ways, and it is because of this that God has given us a revelation of *His* mind; and in that revelation, He plainly declares, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa 55:8-9). In view of such a Scripture as this, it is only to be expected that much of the contents of the Bible *conflicts* with the sentiments of the carnal mind that is “*enmity against God*” (Rom 8:7). Further: in view of such a Scripture as the above, we need not be surprised that much of human history is so perplexing to our understandings.

The natural world, to begin with the simplest, presents sufficient problems to humble man, were it not that he was blinded by pride. Why should there be diseases and remedies for them? Why poisons and

⁹ **prate** – talk too much in a stupid or boring way.

their antidotes? Why rats and mice and cats to kill them? Why not have left unmade the evils, and then no necessity for the instruments to remove them! Ah, why are we so slow to learn that God's ways are different from ours? And when we enter the human realm, the mystery deepens. What is man placed here for at all? To learn some lesson or lessons or to undergo some test or experience that he could not learn or undergo elsewhere? If so, then why is such a large proportion of the race removed in infancy, before such lessons can be learned and such experiences be gained? Why indeed! Such questions as these might be multiplied indefinitely, but sufficient has been said to point out the manifest *limitations* of human wisdom. And if we are confronted with insoluble problems in the domain of nature and of human existence, what of the *divine* realm? Who can fathom the ways of the Almighty? "Canst thou by searching find out God?" (Job 11:7). No indeed. "Clouds and darkness are round about him" (Psa 97:2). If God were not a mystery, He would not be God to us.

But why write in this strain? Surely the need of our day is for that which will strengthen faith, not that which paralyzes it. True; but what is faith? We mean faith in the abstract. Faith is, essentially, an attitude rather than an act: it is that which lies behind the act. Faith is an attitude of dependency, of recognized weakness. Faith is a coming to the end of ourselves and looking outside of ourselves—away from ourselves. Faith is that which gives God *His* proper place. And if we give God His proper place, we must take *our* proper place, and that is in the dust. And what is there that will bring the haughty, self-sufficient creature into the dust so quickly as a sight of the Godhead of God! Nothing is so humbling to the human heart as a true recognition of the absolute sovereignty of God. So then, instead of seeking to weaken faith, we write to promote and strengthen it. The chief trouble is that so much that passes for faith today is only maudlin¹⁰ sentimentality. The faith of Christendom in this [twenty-first] century is mere credulity, and the "god" of many of our churches is not the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, but a mere figment of the imagination.

Modern theology has invented a "god" that the finite mind can understand, whose ways are pleasing to the natural man, a "god" who is altogether "such an one as" (Psa 50:21) those who profess to worship him, a "god" concerning whom there is little or no mystery. But how different the God that the Holy Scriptures reveal! Of Him, it is said [that] His ways are "past finding out" (Rom 11:33)...

¹⁰ **maudlin** – expressing or causing exaggerated emotions.

The God of Scripture is *absolutely sovereign*. Such is His own claim: “This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?” (Isa 14:26-27). The sovereignty of God is absolute and irresistible: “All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan 4:35). The sovereignty of God is true not only hypothetically, but in fact. That is to say, God exercises His sovereignty, exercises it both in the natural realm and in the spiritual. One is born black, another white. One is born in wealth, another in poverty. One is born with a healthy body, another sickly and crippled. One is cut off in childhood, another lives to old age. One is endowed with five talents, another with but one. And in all these cases, it is God the Creator Who maketh one to differ from another, and “none can stay his hand” (Dan 4:35). And so it is in the spiritual realm. One is born in a pious home and is brought up in the fear and admonition of the Lord; another is born of criminal parents and is reared in vice. One is the object of many prayers, the other is not prayed for at all. One hears the gospel from early childhood, another never hears it. One sits under a scriptural ministry, another hears nothing but error and heresy. Of those who do hear the gospel, one has his heart opened by the Lord to receive the truth, while another is left to himself. One is “ordained to eternal life” (Act 13:48), while another is “ordained to...condemnation” (Jude 1:4). To whom He will God shows mercy, and whom He wills He hardens (Rom 9:18).

From *The Godhood of God*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952): Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, author; born in Nottingham, England, UK.



Faith upholds [a Christian] under all trials by assuring him that every dispensation is under the direction of his Lord; that chastisements are a token of His love; that the season, measure, and continuance of his sufferings are appointed by Infinite Wisdom and designed to work for his everlasting good; and that grace and strength shall be afforded him according to his [need].—*John Newton*

THE PROPERTIES OF PROVIDENCE

William S. Plumer (1802-1880)

GOD'S providence results from His nature. It is holy, just, benevolent, wise, supreme and sovereign, sure and stable, powerful and irresistible.

The world over, the unrenewed heart is pagan in its inclinations. It does not like to retain God in its thoughts. The Epicurean¹ doctrine, that God is too exalted to notice the affairs of men, naturally flows from the ignorance and enmity² of the carnal mind. But, "Shall I not do as I please with mine own?" is the challenge of the Almighty (Mat 20:15). To manage the affairs of the universe cannot disturb the divine tranquility. To Him Who made all things by the word of His power, the care of them cannot be burdensome. God is not like man. He never grows weary. That He has a right to establish an all-pervading government over His creatures is as certain as that He has any rights at all. Were our hearts not wrong, we should glory in His providence; and were our minds not feeble and our faculties not limited, we should see that all objection to God's care of the world was worse than frivolous.

In this age, it is commonly admitted that the Lord liveth and ruleth in the kingdoms of men. This is the avowed theory. The practical belief of many is quite diverse. There are not a few whose prevailing plans, fears, and hopes would hardly be more practically atheistic if they should avow disbelief of God's existence and of the divine government over human affairs. Were God, in open day, before their eyes, miraculously to suspend the laws of nature, they might for a time, perhaps, be impressed and confess that here was the finger of God! It is probable, however, that this impression would not be lasting. For in His ceaseless support and maintenance of the course of nature, such men perceive nothing to admire, nothing to adore. Were the hand that moves all worlds to arrest the sun in the heavens and cause him to stand still for even an hour, they might say, "This is the Lord." But the sun may rise, run his race, and duly set three hundred and sixty-five times in the year, and nothing is said or thought of Him at Whose rebuke "the pillars of heaven tremble" (Job 26:11) and by Whose ordinance the

¹ **Epicurean** – related to the philosophy of Epicurus (341-270 BC), which taught that pleasure was the highest good, that the gods do not concern themselves with human affairs, and that the world results from the change combination of atoms.

² **enmity** – hostility.

everlasting mountains and the order of universal nature have their stability. “A brutish man knoweth not; neither doth a fool understand” (Psa 92:6). Such men virtually or actually say, “The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard” (Psa 94:7). To correct such errors is one object of revelation. Scripture puts the stamp of profaneness³ on all such thoughts as allow men to believe that they may act independently of God.

God is above all law, being Himself independent and supreme. His own infinitely excellent nature is the law of His being and of His action. This very nature fits Him in all respects to be the ruler of the world.

God’s providence is holy. Because God is holy, His providence is holy in all its works. He plots no mischief, works no evil, favors no sin; but in the winding up of human affairs, He will bring a terrible overthrow on all the workers of iniquity. He hates sin with a perfect hatred. To Him it is a “horrible thing” (Jer 5:30). It cannot be proven that God hates anything but sin. Nor has any mortal an adequate conception of the intensity of the aversion⁴ of the divine mind to every form and species of iniquity. “Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy” (Rev 15:4). Indeed, the bliss of the heavenly world depends upon the absolute and unqualified confidence of saints and angels in the infinite rectitude⁵ of God’s nature (Isa 6:3). “The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works” (Psa 145:17).

God’s providence is just. From God’s holiness necessarily results His justice. Dr. Woods: “The plan of providence is such that sin will be stigmatized and sinners punished, while holiness will be honored, and those who are holy rewarded.” Justice is certainly an amiable attribute in any person or government. By a fiction of law under the British Constitution, “The king can do no wrong.” The reason is that his ministers are responsible. But it is no fiction of law or theology that the Judge of all the earth cannot but do right (Gen 18:25). In the worship of the temple not made with hands, they sing, “Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints” (Rev 15:3).

God’s providence is benevolent. Indeed, God’s “tender mercies are over all his works” (Psa 145:9). “The same benevolence, which

³ **profaneness** – contempt or irreverence for the sacred.

⁴ **aversion** – feeling of intense dislike.

⁵ **rectitude** – morally correct behavior; righteousness.

prompted Him to create the world, must prompt Him to preserve and govern it...When we consider the care of providence over the children of men, as it is manifested either in the works of nature or of grace, we naturally fall into the reflection, ‘What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?’ (Psa 8:4); and we wonder to see so much done for men, who seem to have no merit or desert equal to the concern shown for them.”⁶

God’s providence is wise. In it are no gaps, no failures, no mistakes, no oversights. “The same wisdom which contrived so wonderful and glorious a system can and will direct and control it.”⁷ Because God’s plans embrace all causes and all effects, all facts and all [possibilities], all actions and all words, it is impossible that He should be overreached. It is infinitely easy for Him to take “the wise in their own craftiness” (Job 5:13). The greatest monarch of his time, one whose kingdom embraced much of the wealth, learning, and civilization of the world, and who was surrounded by able men, said to his council of state: “Come on, let us deal wisely” (Exo 1:10). They formed their plans. From first to last, they were encompassed with difficulties. And they were followed by terrific judgments. Go now and stand with Moses, Aaron, and Miriam on the banks of the Red Sea, and behold the end of all this “wise dealing.” Pharaoh, his host, and his chosen captains are perished. “The depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone...they sank as lead in the mighty waters” (Exo 15:5, 10). All the amazing operations of vegetation are by inspired men ascribed to the “LORD of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working” (Isa 28:29). “O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches. So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts” (Psa 104:24-25).

God’s providence is supreme, and therefore sovereign. It is over all and above all. He has no divided dominion. He is sole arbiter⁸ of events and destinies. He says: “See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand” (Deu 32:39). “I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God” (Isa 44:6). “I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me...there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me” (Isa 45:5, 21). So that it is as clear that God rules alone as that He rules

⁶ Leonard Woods, *The Works of Leonard Woods*, Vol. 2 (Boston: Jewett & Company, 1851), 1.

⁷ *Ibid*, 1.

⁸ **arbiter** – one who has power to decide or ordain according to his own absolute pleasure.

at all; that He rules everywhere as that He rules anywhere; that He governs all agents, all causes, and all events, as that He governs any of them. To surrender in whole or in part His control of the universe would be to admit that He was not God, that another was as strong, as wise, or as good as Himself (Isa 41:23). It would argue some defect in Him Who has all perfection. An angel would be burdened with the sole charge of one man because an angel is a finite creature and has none but derived attributes; but the care of the universe is no burden to the Almighty because He is God. His will is the law of all worlds. He “stretched out the earth above the waters” (Psa 136:6). “Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places” (Psa 135:6). “All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan 4:35). “The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens” (Psa 113:4).

God’s providence is sure and stable. Whoever wishes to walk securely needs but to conform himself to its settled provisions and principles (Pro 10:9). Never was there a sin that did not bring misery; never was the human being born that did not make some impression on the world; never was there an effect without a cause; never did God change a principle of moral law; never did He abolish a physical law; never did the hand of the negligent make rich...Never was there a time when destruction was not easy and construction difficult; never was the general course of providence without its compensations, the Lord setting the day of adversity over against the day of prosperity, or comforting the heart of His troubled ones with the fact that the same afflictions are accomplished in their brethren (1Pe 5:9). Greatly was the psalmist comforted with this view of the stability of God’s government: “For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth. They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all are thy servants” (Psa 119:89-91; *cf.* Pro 19:21; Jos 23:14).

God’s providence is powerful, yes, it is irresistible. His providence not only consults, but it also executes. It not only devises, but it also puts into operation. It not only sees how evil may be prevented, but it also prevents evil. It is so powerful that it even brings good out of evil, making bad men and fallen angels to serve God’s designs, while they intend no such thing. [It gives] the greatest efficiency to causes apparently the most contemptible and infallibly [secures] the accomplishment of the very best ends. The author of providence is “the Lord,

which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty” (Rev 1:8). All the other attributes of God would not avail us if He had not omnipotence whereby to enforce and execute His will. All other properties of His providence would fail to give effectual consolation if it lacked divine power. No marvel, therefore, that the Scriptures so frequently celebrate the triumphs of omnipotence. Otherwise, the wicked would say, “Where is their Rock in Whom they have trusted?” As to the Assyrian, so to every foe Jehovah says, “Because thy rage against me and thy tumult is come up into mine ears, therefore I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest” (2Ki 19:28). It will be for an everlasting rejoicing to all the righteous that when God makes a covenant of peace with His people, He is able to “cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land,” so that His people may “dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods” (Eze 34:25). By His almighty power, He bringeth mariners out of their distresses. “He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still” (Psa 107:29). All conspiracies and combinations against providence are vain (Eze 21:21-23).

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William S. Plumer (1802-1880): American Presbyterian minister and author; born in Greensburg, PA, USA.



It is the way of God to work by contraries, to turn the greatest evil into the greatest good. To grant great good after great evil is one thing, and to turn great evils into the greatest good is another. Yet that is God’s way: many times, the greatest good that God intends for His people, He works out of the greatest evil; the greatest light is brought out of the greatest darkness. Luther, I remember, hath a notable expression for this: saith he, “It is the way of God: He doth humble that He might exalt; he doth kill that He might make alive; He doth confound that he might glorify. This is the way of God,” saith He. “But,” saith he, “everyone doth not understand this. This is the Art of arts, the Science of sciences, and the Knowledge of knowledges to understand this: when God doth bring life, he doth bring it out of death. He brings joy out of sorrow, and He brings prosperity out of adversity. Yea, and many times, He brings grace out of sin, that is, He makes use of sin to work furtherance of grace. It is the way of God to bring good out of evil; not only to overcome the evil, but to make the evil work towards good! Here is the way of God. Now when the soul comes to understand this, it will take away our murmuring and bring contentment into our spirits.—*Jeremiah Burroughs*

GOD RULES EVERYTHING

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.—Psalm 103:19

GOD governs **inanimate**¹ matter. That inanimate matter performs His bidding and fulfils His decrees is clearly shown on the very frontispiece² of divine revelation. God said, “Let there be light,” and we read, “*There was light*” (Gen 1:3). God said, “Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so” (1:9). And again, “God said, Let the earth bring forth grass the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so” (1:11). And the Psalmist declares, “He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Psa 33:9).

What is stated in Genesis 1 is afterwards illustrated all through the Bible. After the creation of Adam, sixteen centuries went by before ever a shower of rain fell upon the earth, for before Noah “there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground” (Gen 2:6). But when the iniquities of the antediluvians³ had come to the full, then God said, “And, behold, *I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth*, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die.” In fulfillment of this we read, “In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights” (Gen 6:17; 7:11-12).

Witness God’s absolute (and *sovereign*) control of inanimate matter in connection with the plagues of Egypt. At His bidding, the light was turned into darkness and rivers into blood; hail fell, and death came down upon the godless land of the Nile, until even its haughty monarch was compelled to cry out for deliverance. Note particularly how the inspired record here emphasizes God’s absolute control over the elements:

¹ **inanimate** – not alive, especially not in the manner of animals and humans.

² **frontispiece** – first page of a book, here describing the opening verses of Genesis.

³ **antediluvians** – people who lived before the biblical flood of Noah’s day.

“And Moses stretched forth his rod toward heaven: and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and the fire ran along upon the ground; and the LORD rained hail upon the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, very grievous, such as there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. And the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail smote every herb of the field, and brake every tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, was there no hail” (Exo 9:23-26). The same distinction was observed in connection with the ninth plague: “And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness which may be felt. And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days: They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days: but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings” (Exo 10:21-23).

The above examples are by no means isolated cases. At God’s decree, fire and brimstone descended from heaven, the cities of the plain were destroyed, and a fertile valley was converted into a loathsome sea of death. At His bidding, the waters of the Red Sea parted asunder so that the Israelites passed over dry shod, and at His word they rolled back again and destroyed the Egyptians who were pursuing them. A word from Him, and the earth opened her mouth, and Korah and his rebellious company were swallowed up. The furnace of Nebuchadnezzar was heated seven times beyond its normal temperature, and into it three of God’s children were cast; but the fire did not so much as scorch their clothes though it slew the men who cast them into it.

What a demonstration of the Creator’s governmental control over the elements was furnished when He became flesh and tabernacled among men! Behold Him asleep in the boat. A storm arises. The winds roar and the waves are lashed into fury. The disciples who are with Him, fearful lest their little craft should founder, awake their Master, saying, “Carest thou not that we perish?” And then we read, “And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm” (Mar 4:38-39). Mark again, the sea, at the will of its Creator, bore Him up upon its waves. At a word from Him, the fig tree withered; at His touch disease fled instantly...

What a declaration *this* is: “He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly. He giveth snow like wool: he scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes. He casteth forth his ice like

morsels: who can stand before his cold? He sendeth out his word, and melteth them: he causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow” (Psa 147:15-18). The mutations of the elements are beneath God’s sovereign control. It is God Who withholds the rain; and it is God Who gives the rain when He wills, where He wills, as He wills, and on whom He wills. Weather bureaus may attempt to give forecasts of the weather, but how frequently God mocks their calculations! Sun spots, the varying activities of the planets, the appearing and disappearing of comets (to which abnormal weather is sometimes attributed), atmospheric disturbances, are merely secondary causes, for behind them all is God Himself...

Truly, then, God governs inanimate matter. Earth and air, fire and water, hail and snow, stormy winds and angry seas all perform the word of His power and fulfil His sovereign pleasure. Therefore, when we complain about the weather, we are murmuring against God.

God governs irrational creatures. What a striking illustration of God’s government over the animal kingdom is found in Genesis 2:19! “And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof” (Gen 2:19). Should it be said that this occurred in Eden and took place before the Fall of Adam and the consequent curse that was inflicted on every creature, then our next reference fully meets the objection: God’s control of the beasts was again openly displayed at the Flood. Mark how God caused to “come unto” Noah every species of living creature: “of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female. Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee” (Gen 6:19-20)—all were beneath God’s sovereign control. The lion of the jungle, the elephant of the forest, the bear of the polar regions, the ferocious panther, the untamable wolf, the fierce tiger, the high-soaring eagle, and the creeping crocodile—see them all in their native fierceness, and yet, quietly submitting to the will of their Creator, and coming two by two into the ark!

We referred to the plagues sent upon Egypt as illustrating God’s control of inanimate matter; let us now turn to them again to see how they demonstrate His perfect rulership over irrational creatures. At His word, the river brought forth frogs abundantly, and these frogs entered the palace of Pharaoh and the houses of his servants. Contrary to their natural instincts, they entered the beds, the ovens, and the kneading-

troughs (Exo 8:3-13). Swarms of flies invaded the land of Egypt, but there were no flies in the land of Goshen! (Exo 8:22). Next, the cattle were stricken, and we read, "Behold, the hand of the LORD is upon thy cattle which is in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep: there shall be a very grievous murrain. And the LORD shall sever between the cattle of Israel and the cattle of Egypt: and there shall nothing die of all that is the children's of Israel. And the LORD appointed a set time, saying, To morrow the LORD shall do this thing in the land. And the LORD did that thing on the morrow, and all the cattle of Egypt died: but of the cattle of the children of Israel died not one" (Exo 9:3-6)...Is further proof required? Then it is ready at hand. God makes a dumb ass to rebuke the prophet's madness. He sends forth two she-bears from the woods to devour forty and two of Elijah's tormentors. In fulfillment of His word, He causes the dogs to lick up the blood of the wicked Jezebel. He seals the mouths of Babylon's lions when Daniel is cast into the den, though later He causes them to devour the prophet's accusers. He prepares a great fish to swallow the disobedient Jonah and then, when His ordained hour struck, compelled it to vomit him forth on dry land. At His bidding, a fish carries a coin to Peter for tribute money, and to fulfil His word He makes the cock crow twice after Peter's denial. Thus, we see that God reigns over irrational creatures: beasts of the field, birds of the air, fishes of the sea—all perform His sovereign bidding.

God governs the children of men. We fully appreciate the fact that this is the most difficult part of our subject; and, accordingly, it will be dealt with at greater length in the pages that follow. But at present, we consider the *fact* of God's government over men in general before we attempt to deal with the problem in detail.

Two alternatives confront us; and between them, we are obliged to choose: either God governs or He is governed; either God rules or He is ruled; either God has His way or men have theirs. And is our choice between these alternatives hard to make? Shall we say that in man we behold a creature so unruly that he is beyond God's control? Shall we say that sin has alienated the sinner so far from the thrice Holy One that he is outside the pale of His jurisdiction? Or shall we say that man has been endowed with moral responsibility, and therefore God must leave him entirely free, at least during the period of his probation? Does it necessarily follow because the natural man is an outlaw against heaven, a rebel against the divine government, that God is unable to fulfil His purpose through him? We mean not merely that He may *over-rule* the effects of the actions of evildoers, nor that He will yet bring the

wicked to stand before His judgment bar so that sentence of punishment may be passed upon them—multitudes of non-Christians believe these things—but we mean that every action of the most lawless of His subjects is entirely beneath His control, yea that the actor is, though unknown to himself, carrying out the secret decrees of the Most High. Was it not thus with Judas? And is it possible to select a more extreme case? If then the arch-rebel was performing the counsel of God, is it any greater tax upon our faith to believe the same of all rebels?

Our present object is no philosophic inquiry nor metaphysical casuistry, but to ascertain the teaching of Scripture upon this profound theme. “To the law and to the testimony” (Isa 8:20), for there only can we learn of the divine government—its character, its design, its *modus operandi*,⁴ its scope. What, then, has it pleased God to reveal to us in His blessed Word concerning His rule over the works of His hands, and particularly, over the one who originally was made in His own image and likeness?

“In him we live, and move, and have our being” (Act 17:28). What a sweeping assertion is this! These words, be it noted, were addressed, not to one of the churches of God, not to a company of saints who had reached an exalted plane of spirituality, but to a heathen audience, to those who worshipped “the unknown God” and who “mocked” when they heard of the resurrection of the dead (Act 17:23, 32). And yet, to the Athenian philosophers, to the Epicureans and Stoics, the apostle Paul did not hesitate to affirm that they lived and moved and had their being in God, which signified not only that they owed their existence and preservation to the One Who made the world and all things therein, but also that their very actions were encompassed and therefore controlled by the Lord of heaven and earth. Compare Daniel 5:23, last clause!

“The preparations [*disposings* (margin)] of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD” (Pro 16:1). Mark that the above declaration is of general application—it is of “man,” not simply of believers, that this is predicated. “A man’s heart deviseth his way; but the LORD directeth his steps” (Pro 16:9). If the Lord *directs* the steps of a man, is it not proof that he is being controlled or governed by God? Again: “There are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand” (Pro 19:21). Can this mean anything less than that no matter what man may desire and plan, it is the will of his Maker that is executed?...“The king’s heart is in the hand

⁴ *modus operandi* – mode of operation; procedure.

of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will” (Pro 21:1). What could be more explicit? Out of the heart are “the issues of life” (Pro 4:23), for as a man “thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Pro 23:7). If the heart is in the hand of the Lord, and if “he turneth it whithersoever he will,” then is it not clear that men, yea, governors and rulers, and so *all men*, are completely beneath the governmental control of the Almighty!

No limitations must be placed upon the above declarations. To insist that *some* men, at least, do thwart God’s will and overturn His counsels is to repudiate other Scriptures equally explicit. Weigh well the following: “But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth” (Job 23:13). “The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations” (Psa 33:11). “There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD” (Pro 21:30). “For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul⁵ it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?” (Isa 14:27). “Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Isa 46:9-10). There is no ambiguity⁶ in these passages. They affirm in the most unequivocal⁷ and unqualified terms that it is impossible to bring to naught the purpose of Jehovah...

Ah, the heathen may “rage” and the people imagine a “vain thing”; the kings of earth may “set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD” and against His Christ, saying, “Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us” (Psa 2:1-3). But is the great God perturbed or disturbed by the rebellion of His puny creatures? No, indeed: “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision” (Psa 2:4). He is infinitely exalted above all, and the greatest confederacies of earth’s pawns and their most extensive and vigorous preparations to defeat His purpose are, in His sight, altogether puerile.⁸ He looks upon their puny efforts, not only without any alarm, but He “laughs” at their folly. He treats their impotency with “derision.” He knows that He can crush them like moths when He pleases or consume them in a moment with the breath

⁵ **disannul** – cancel and do away with.

⁶ **ambiguity** – uncertainty because of having more than one possible meaning.

⁷ **unequivocal** – having only one meaning and leading to only one conclusion.

⁸ **puerile** – childishly silly and immature.

of His mouth. Ah, it is but “a *vain* thing” for the potsherds⁹ of the earth to strive with the glorious Majesty of heaven. Such is our God; worship ye Him.

Mark, too, the *sovereignty* that God displayed in His dealings with men! Moses, who was slow of speech, not Aaron his elder brother, who was not slow of speech, was the one chosen to be His ambassador in demanding from Egypt’s monarch the release of His oppressed people. Moses again, though greatly beloved, utters one hasty word and was excluded from Canaan, whereas Elijah passionately murmurs and suffers but a mild rebuke and was afterwards taken to heaven without seeing death! Uzzah merely touched the ark and was instantly slain, whereas the Philistines carried it off in insulting triumph and suffered no immediate harm. Displays of grace that would have brought a doomed Sodom to repentance failed to move a highly privileged Capernaum. Mighty works that would have subdued Tyre and Sidon left the upbraided cities of Galilee under the curse of a rejected gospel. If they would have prevailed over the former, why were they not wrought there? If they proved ineffectual to deliver the latter, then why perform them? What exhibitions are these of the sovereign will of the Most High!

God governs both good and evil angels. The angels are God’s servants, His messengers, His chariots. They ever hearken to the word of His mouth and do His commands...[Many] Scriptures might be cited to show that the angels are in subjection to the will of their Creator and perform His bidding: “And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod” (Act 12:11). “The Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done” (Rev 22:6). So it will be when our Lord returns: “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity” (Mat 13:41). Again, we read, “He shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Mat 24:31).

The same is true of *evil* spirits: they, too, fulfil God’s sovereign decrees. God sent an evil spirit to stir up rebellion in the camp of Abimelech: “Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem,” which aided him in the killing of his brethren (Jdg 9:23). Another evil spirit He sent to be a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab’s prophets: “Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying

⁹ **potsherds** – fragments of broken pottery.

spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee” (1Ki 22:23). And yet another was sent by the Lord to trouble Saul: “But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him” (1Sa 16:14). So, too, in the New Testament: a whole legion of the demons goes not out of their victim until the Lord gave them *permission* to enter the herd of swine (Mar 5:9-13).

It is clear from Scripture, then, that the angels, good and evil, are under God’s control and willingly or unwillingly carry out God’s purpose. Yea, *Satan himself* is absolutely subject to God’s control. When arraigned¹⁰ in Eden, he listened to the awful sentence but answered not a word. He was unable to touch Job until God granted him leave. So, too, he had to gain our Lord’s consent before he could “sift” Peter. When Christ commanded him to depart—“Get thee hence, Satan”—we read, “Then the devil leaveth him” (Mat 4:10-11). And, in the end, he will be cast into the Lake of Fire that has been prepared for him and his angels.

“The Lord God omnipotent reigneth” (Rev 19:6). His government is exercised over inanimate matter, over the brute beasts, over the children of men, over angels good and evil, and over Satan himself. No revolving world, no shining of star, no storm, no creature moves, no actions of men, no errands of angels, no deeds of devil—nothing in all the vast universe can come to pass otherwise than God has eternally purposed. Here is a foundation of faith. Here is a resting place for the intellect. Here is “an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast” (Heb 6:19). It is not blind fate, unbridled evil, man or devil, but the Lord Almighty Who is ruling the world, ruling it according to His own good pleasure and for His own eternal glory.

From *The Sovereignty of God*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.



What do you believe when you say, “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth?” I believe in the everlasting Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who made of nothing heaven and earth with all that are in them, Who likewise upholds and governs the same by His eternal counsel and providence. This God I believe to be my God and Father for Christ’s sake, and therefore to trust in Him and rely on Him that I do not doubt that He will provide all things necessary both for my soul and body. But also, whatever evils He sends on me in this troublesome life, He will turn out to my safety because He is both able to do it, being God Almighty, and willing to do it, being a bountiful Father.—*Hercules Collins*

¹⁰ **arraigned** – called before a court to answer charges made against him.

GOD'S PROVIDENCE APPLIED

Joel R. Beeke

NOTHING is more practical than the doctrine of providence, for it engenders¹ both faith and godly fear. When Christ teaches us how to deal with anxiety, He reminds us that God the Father feeds every little bird and clothes every flower with its lovely colors (Mat 6:25-30). How much more, then, should we trust Him to care for His own beloved children? Whether one is willing to admit it or not, everyone constantly lives in the presence of the living God. The more the believer is conscious of God's providence, the more it can be said of him, as B. B. Warfield wrote, "Everywhere he sees God in His mighty stepping, everywhere he feels the working of His mighty arm, the throbbing of His mighty heart."²

Our God is in control. While we cannot fully plumb the depths of God's ways, we can still affirm that "of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever" (Rom 11:36). There are many things for which we do not know the reason, but for everything we know Who has ordained them. Obadiah Sedgwick wrote, "No one is so fit to govern the world as He Who made it." His perfect wisdom, holiness, justice, power, love, and goodness will not fail.

Consequently, we can be like the child on board a ship who remained peaceful while wind and waves raged around him. When asked how he kept calm in such a violent storm, he replied, "My father is the captain." How much more can the church sing, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea" (Psa 46:1-2).

God's providence benefits believers in many ways. Let us consider five of them.

Trust in God's fatherly sovereignty. The God-centered Christian worldview establishes our trust that our Father reigns over all things through His Son by the Holy Spirit. The Heidelberg Catechism says, "The eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Who of nothing made heaven and earth, with all that is in them; Who likewise upholds and governs the

¹ engenders – produces.

² Benjamin B. Warfield, *Calvin as a Theologian and Calvinism Today* (London: Evangelical Press, 1969), 27.

same by His eternal counsel and providence) is for the sake of Christ His Son, my God and my Father; on Whom I rely so entirely, that I have no doubt but He will provide me with all things necessary for soul and body; and further, that He will make whatever evils He sends upon me, in this valley of tears, turn out to my advantage; for He is able to do it, being Almighty God, and willing, being a faithful Father” (Q&A 26).

The doctrines of providence and adoption link arms to undergird God's children with a wonderful confidence. The sovereign God is their loving Father in Jesus Christ, so that in all of life they “are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by Him as by a Father; yet never cast off,” as the Westminster Confession of Faith says (12.1). John Cotton exclaimed, “Is it a light matter for the God of heaven and earth to be called your Father, since you are but men?” As our Father, God will surely give “provision for a son here [and] provision for an heir hereafter,” for “God nurtures us” and “hath given us an inheritance.”³

We live in a dangerous world. Disease, disaster, and war sweep many people into eternity every day. Evil men oppress and abuse the godly and the innocent. Unseen to our eyes, Satan and his host go about like roaring lions seeking to devour people and drag them to damnation (1Pe 5:8). The deceptions and passions of sin rage in our hearts, so that we are never safe from ourselves. Realism demands that we live wisely and prudently in such a perilous place.

However, Christians need not live fearfully or anxiously but may cling to the promise of Romans 8:28: “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God.” Thomas Watson wrote: “All the various dealings of God with His children do by a special providence turn to their good. ‘All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant’ (Psa 25:10).”⁴ He concluded, “The grand reason why all things shall work for good is the near and dear interest which God hath in His people. The Lord hath made a covenant with them: ‘They shall be my people, and I will be their God’ (Jer 32:38).”⁵

God's providence comforts His covenant people. Sedgwick said, “No good man ever lacked anything that was good for him. I may lack a thing which is good, but not which is good for me: ‘For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he

³ John Cotton, *A Practical Commentary: An Exposition with Observations, Reasons, and Uses upon the First Epistle General of John* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2015), 323.

⁴ Thomas Watson, *A Divine Cordial* (The Religious Tract Society, 1846), 8.

⁵ Watson, *A Divine Cordial*, 55.

withhold from them that walk uprightly' (Psa 84:11)."⁶

God has a special providence over His living church because we are the apple of His eye, His lambs, His children, and His jewels (Zec 2:8; Isa 40:11; 49:15; Mal 3:17). His care for His people is entirely gracious, tender, mysterious, glorious, exact, and often extraordinary.

Faith in God's providence supports the Christian's service to God. It is his shield against all the attacks of Satan (Eph 6:16). Warfield said, "A firm faith in the universal providence of God is the solution of all earthly troubles."⁷ Rather than being paralyzed with fear or driven about by anxiety, the strong believer stands on the stable ground of divine providence and advances ahead in firm obedience and submission to his Master's will.

Childlike faith in prayer. People who believe in God's providence are people of prayer who know and believe that their providing God commands, hears, and answers prayer. They know that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Jam 1:17).

John Calvin said, "It will not suffice simply to hold that there is One Whom all ought to honor and adore, unless we are also persuaded that He is the fountain of every good, and that we must seek nothing elsewhere than in Him...No drop will be found either of wisdom and light, or of righteousness or power or rectitude, or of genuine truth, which does not flow from Him, and of which He is not the cause."⁸

Prayer is the cry of childlike faith. When we pray, "Our Father which art in heaven...Give us this day our daily bread," as our Lord taught us (Mat 6:9, 11), we acknowledge God "to be the only fountain of all good, and that neither our care nor industry" can get us what we need and desire without His blessing, and therefore, we "withdraw our trust from all creatures and place it alone" in Him (Heidelberg Catechism 125).

The Lord teaches us to go to Him with every need, with all our frailty, with all our cares. Knowing that He is our provider, we should seek from Him our food and drink, health, clothing, good relationships in our families, success in our callings, the Spirit's power in our

⁶ Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 173.

⁷ B. B. Warfield, "God's Providence over All" in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 1:111.

⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. McNeill, trans. Battles, Vol. 1, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 41.

churches, and peace for our nation. We should cast “all [our] care upon him; for he careth for [us]” (1Pe 5:7).

Knowing God's providence fosters humility, which is vital for prayer. The Holy Scriptures remind us that no matter how hard we work, we cannot get anything unless we receive it from His hand (Psa 104:28; Joh 3:27). Indeed, we cannot move a finger, blink an eye, or think a thought without His enablement. We may have the greatest skills and the most impressive list of experiences and references, but “it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth” (Deu 8:18). Even with strength and skill, we might toil all day and fail to attain our goals. “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain” (Psa 127:1).

Therefore, we must trust in God alone and seek all good things from Him. Oh, to have a true sense of our constant dependence on Him! So often people go to work day after day, buy groceries, take medicine, pay bills, and enjoy pleasures—but do not give a thought to Him and the fact that all depends on His will. Their hearts are lifted in pride, they forget the Lord, and they say, “My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth” (Deu 8:17). Their prayerlessness is the nail that seals the coffin of their spiritual deadness. But the child of God has the Spirit of adoption crying in his heart, “Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6). He knows by a Spirit-infused instinct that all deliverance from evil and enjoyment of good comes from his Father. And therefore, he prays. And you? Do you pray? Are your prayers a sincere seeking after Him Who is the fountain of all good? Do you really believe in the God of providence?

Patience in adversity. The Heidelberg Catechism highlights three more benefits of knowing God's providence: “That we may be patient in adversity; thankful in prosperity; and that in all things, which may hereafter befall us, we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father, that nothing shall separate us from His love; since all creatures are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move” (Q&A 28).

[Another] benefit, therefore, is patience in adversity. We naturally respond to adversity by sinking into self-centered bitterness or falling into despondency. However, even when our circumstances are turbulent or painful, the Christian should cultivate inner quietness by exercising faith in God's providence. David said, “I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it” (Psa 39:9). Godly quietness under sorrow comes not from hardening our hearts and shutting down our emotions but from clinging to God during the storm.

Christian patience in adversity (“longsuffering”) is a supernatural fruit of God’s Spirit (Gal 5:22). Unbelievers may grimly resign themselves to circumstances they cannot change; believers, however, persevere in faith, believing that the greatest evils will be turned to their profit and will work for their good in the hands of a loving, faithful God. By God’s grace and in answer to prayer, we can be “strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering” (Col 1:11). By the Spirit, Christ’s disciples are willing cross bearers (Luk 9:23).

Those who believe in providence rest in God’s purposes for their afflictions. They understand and approve of God’s intention to train up His children to mature holiness by their sorrows and trials (Pro 3:11-12; Heb 12:5-11). They say, “Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word...It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes” (Psa 119:67, 71). Though they often cannot see how, they trust that God is glorifying Himself through their struggles, not least by showing that He is worthy of their faith and godly fear even when He does not give them happiness here and now (Job 1:1, 8-11, 20-21). They live in union and communion with Christ and rejoice to suffer with Him, knowing that one day they shall reign with Him in glory (Rom 8:17). They resolve to “run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb 12:1-2).

The Christian’s hope in God’s purposes depends on faith that He really does control all things. Johannes VanderKemp said, “If no universal Ruler directed whatsoever comes to pass, how should good men be able to quiet and comfort themselves in all their tribulations? Would not their condition be worse than that of the wicked?”⁹

One of the greatest trials a believer may endure is that of spiritual darkness. Westminster Confession of Faith 18.4 notes, “True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted,” sometimes “by God’s withdrawing the light of His countenance, and suffering even such as fear Him to walk in darkness and to have no light” (see Isa 50:10). Anthony Burgess¹⁰ explained that God may temporarily withdraw a believer’s joy and assurance of His love so that His beloved child may taste the bitterness of sin and learn to hate it more, grow in humility, treasure joy and peace and not

⁹ Johannes VanderKemp, *The Christian Entirely the Property of Christ, in Life and Death* (1810; Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 1997), 1:223.

¹⁰ **Anthony Burgess (d. 1664)** – English Westminster Puritan theologian and pastor.

take them for granted, glorify Him by obedience, and increase in compassion to comfort others.

Whether or not the saint walking in darkness can discern its spiritual benefit, he can rest in knowing that his sovereign God always works for His glory and the good of His elect. William Gurnall said, "The Christian must trust in a withdrawing God."¹¹

Dear believer, imagine for a moment that everything in life always went "your way." You were never afflicted. You never faced adversity. What would you be like? I know what I would be like: I would be a spoiled, immature, self-centered, proud sinner who only believed in myself. Though my flesh does not always want to admit it, I know deep within that I have needed every affliction that my heavenly Father has ever sent my way to deliver me from myself and to conform me increasingly to His Son. Without adversity, I never would be a sin-hater, a Christ-lover, and a holiness-pursuer. I would not be the Christian that I am. I suspect you are no different from me.

In all our afflictions, but especially after we have come out of afflictions (Heb 12:11), we shall find that the bitterness of our sorrows is far outweighed by the sweetness of God's good purpose. Our loving Father will not waste one tear of His dear children (Psa 56:8). Samuel Rutherford said, "When I am in the cellar of affliction, I look for the Lord's choicest wines"...

A good expectation for an unknown future. Finally, providence grants us as Christians an assured trust in God for the unknown future. Therefore, Christians should be eternal optimists. Heidelberg Catechism 28 says that the doctrine of providence encourages us to "place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father." Literally, the Dutch reads, "have a good expectation." Child of God, do you have a good expectation for your future? The hand of our Father rules the world, and no one can stop His purposes from being fulfilled (Dan 4:35). "God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Th 5:9). You are in the hand of the Father and the Son, and there is no safer place in the world (Joh 10:28-29).

Since God rules over all things, we can rejoice now that we will one day arrive safely at our everlasting inheritance. Paul says: "If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom 8:31-32). Paul glories in the certain outcome of

¹¹ William Gurnall and John Campbell, *The Christian in Complete Armour* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1845), 5.

providence: “I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38-39).

The doctrine of providence also implies that the opposite is true. If God is against you, who can help you? Nothing in all creation can shield you from the wrath of God if you continue in your sins and refuse to receive His Son with a broken-hearted faith. If you are an unrepentant sinner, consider that you are an enemy of the God of providence. You do not trust His fatherly sovereignty but deeply resent Him and prefer to worship gods of your own imagination. You proudly rely on yourself rather than seeking His grace in prayer. You do not have a thankful heart, though every day you breathe God’s air and drink His water. If you do not repent, then He will take all good away from you and use His sovereign power to punish you forever.

By His providence, the Lord is gathering a people to Himself out of this wicked world. The most extraordinary providence of God is His sending His Son to redeem sinners (Gal 4:4-5). When evil men crucified Jesus Christ, they fulfilled the sovereign purpose of God that His Son die as a ransom for many (Mar 10:45; Act 4:27-28). God raised Christ from the dead by His power, and now Christ sits at God’s right hand as the King of kings and Lord of lords (Psa 2:6; 110:1).

Today, God is working through the gospel so that everyone who turns from sin, trusts in Christ, and calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Rom 10:13). Could it be that God’s providence arranged for you to come across this article so that you would be converted and follow Christ? If you are not yet saved from your sin, then recognize that you are not reading these words by accident. God is speaking to you. By God’s grace, turn away from what you have formerly relied on and put your hope in the living God. And then rejoice, for God causes all things to work together for the good of those converted by His call, those who love Him (Rom 8:28). In all their afflictions on the way to glory, they can say, “We are more than conquerors” (v. 37).

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ALL THINGS WORK FOR GOOD

Thomas Watson (1620-1686)

*And we know that all things work together for good
to them that love God.—Romans 8:28*

THE grand reason why all things shall work for good is the near and dear interest that God hath in His people. The Lord hath made a covenant with them. “They shall be my people, and I will be their God” (Jer 32:38). By virtue of this compact, all things do and must work for good to them. “I am God, even thy God” (Psa 50:7). This word, “thy God,” is the sweetest word in the Bible. It implies the best relations, and it is impossible there should be these relations between God and His people [without all things working] for their good ... The following inferences may be drawn from the proposition that all things work for the good of the saints.

1. If all things work for good, hence¹ learn that there is a providence. Things do not work of themselves, but God sets them working for good. God is the great Disposer² of all events and issues. He sets everything working. “His kingdom ruleth over all” (Psa 103:19). It is meant of His providential kingdom.

Things in the world are not governed by second causes, by the counsels of men, by the stars and planets, but by divine providence. Providence is the queen and governess of the world. There are three things in providence: (1) God’s foreknowing, (2) God’s determining, and (3) God’s directing all things to their periods and events. Whatever things do work in the world, God sets them working... That which is by some called chance is nothing else but the result of providence.

Learn to *adore* providence. Providence has an influence upon all things here below. It is this that mingles the ingredients and makes up the whole compound.

2. Observe the happy condition of every child of God. All things work for his good—the best and worst things. “Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness” (Psa 112:4). The most dark, cloudy providences of God have some sunshine in them. What a blessed condition

¹ hence – consequently; therefore.

² Disposer – One Who determines the course of all events.

is a true believer in! When he dies,³ he goes to God; and while he lives, everything shall do him good. Affliction is for his good. What hurt does the fire to the gold? It only purifies it. What hurt does the fan to the corn? It only separates the chaff from it. What hurt do leeches to the body? They only suck out the bad blood. God never uses His staff but to beat out the dust. Affliction does that which the Word many times will not, it opens the ear to discipline (Job 36:10). When God lays men upon their backs, then they look up to heaven. God's smiting His people is like the musician's striking upon the violin, which makes it put forth a melodious sound. How much good comes to the saints by affliction! When they are pounded and broken, they send forth their sweetest smell. Affliction is a bitter root, but it bears sweet fruit. "It yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Heb 12:11). Affliction is the highway to heaven; though it be flinty⁴ and thorny, yet it is the best way. Poverty shall starve our sins; sickness shall make grace more helpful (2Co 4:16). Reproach shall cause "the spirit of glory and of God" to rest upon us (1Pe 4:14). Death shall stop the bottle of tears and open the gate of Paradise. A believer's dying day is his ascension day to glory. Hence it is, the saints have put their afflictions in the inventory of their riches (Heb 11:26)...A child of God [may] say, "If I had not been afflicted, I had been destroyed; if my health and estate had not been lost, my soul had been lost."

3. See, then, what an encouragement here is to become godly. All things shall work for good. Oh, that this may induce the world to fall in love with religion! Can there be a greater lodestone⁵ to piety? Can anything more prevail with us to be good than this: all things shall work for our good? Religion is the true philosopher's stone that turns everything into gold. Take the sourest part of religion, the suffering part, and there is comfort in it. God sweetens suffering with joy; He candies our wormwood with sugar. Oh, how may this bribe us to godliness! "Acquaint now thyself with [God], and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee" (Job 22:21). No man did ever come off a loser by his acquaintance with God. By this, good shall come unto you, abundance of good, the sweet distillations of grace, the hidden manna, yea, everything shall work for good. Oh, then get acquaintance with God, espouse His interest.⁶

4. Notice the miserable condition of wicked men. To them that are

³ See FGB 253, *Death and Dying*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

⁴ **flinty** – hard; filled with hard rocks.

⁵ **lodestone** – magnet.

⁶ **espouse His interest** – embrace God's cause, that is, His wise governing of all things.

godly, evil things work for good; to them that are evil, good things work for hurt.

(a) *Temporal good things work for hurt to the wicked.* Riches and prosperity are not benefits but snares, as Seneca⁷ says. Worldly things are given to the wicked, as Michal was given to David, for a snare (1Sa 18:21). The vulture is said to draw sickness from a perfume: so do the wicked from the sweet perfume of prosperity. Their mercies are like poisoned bread given to dogs; their tables are sumptuously⁸ spread, but there is a hook under the bait: “Let their table become a snare” (Psa 69:22). All their enjoyments are like Israel’s quails, which were sauced with the wrath of God (Num 11:33). Pride and luxury are the twins of prosperity. “Thou art waxen fat...then he forsook God” (Deu 32:15). Riches are not only like the spider’s web, unprofitable, but like the cockatrice’s⁹ egg, pernicious¹⁰—“riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt” (Ecc 5:13). The common mercies wicked men have are not lodestones to draw them nearer to God, but millstones to sink them deeper in hell (1Ti 6:9). Their delicious dainties are like Haman’s banquet; after all their lordly feasting, death will bring in the bill, and they must pay it in hell.

(b) *Spiritual good things work for hurt to the wicked.* From the flower of heavenly blessings, they suck poison. The ministers of God work for their hurt. The same wind that blows one ship to the haven, blows another ship upon a rock. The same breath in the ministry that blows a godly man to heaven, blows a profane sinner to hell. They who come with the Word of life in their mouths, yet to many are a savor of death. “Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy” (Isa 6:10). The prophet was sent upon a sad message to preach their funeral sermon. Wicked men are worse for preaching. “They hate him that rebuketh in the gate¹¹” (Amo 5:10). Sinners grow more resolved in sin; let God say what He will, they will do what they list.¹² “As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the LORD, we will not hearken unto thee” (Jer 44:16). The Word preached is not healing but hardening. And how dreadful is this for men to be sunk to hell with sermons!

⁷ **Lucius Annaeus Seneca** (also Seneca the Younger) (c. 4 B.C.-A.D. 65) – Roman philosopher and statesman; tutor and later advisor to the Roman emperor Nero.

⁸ **sumptuously** – splendidly; lavishly.

⁹ **cockatrice** – poisonous serpent; viper.

¹⁰ **pernicious** – harmful; destructive.

¹¹ **rebuketh in the gate** – gives a just judgment in the place [the gates] where court was held, meaning that the wicked hate those that pronounce God’s judgment upon them.

¹² **list** – desire.

Prayer works for their hurt. “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD” (Pro 15:8). A wicked man is in a great strait: if he prays not, he sins; if he prays, he sins. “Let his prayer become sin” (Psa 109:7). It is a sad judgment if all the food a man did eat should turn to ill humors and breed diseases in the body: so it is with a wicked man. The prayer that should do him good works for his hurt; he prays against sin and sins against his prayer. His duties are tainted with atheism, fly-blown¹³ with hypocrisy. God abhors them.

The Lord’s Supper works for their hurt. “Ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and of the table of devils. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?” (1Co 10:21-22). Some professors kept their idol-feasts, yet would come to the Lord’s table. The apostle says, “Do [you] provoke the Lord to wrath?” Profane persons feast with their sins yet will come to feast at the Lord’s table. This is to provoke God. To a sinner there is death in the cup—he “eateth and drinketh damnation to himself” (1Co 11:29). Thus, the Lord’s Supper works for hurt to impenitent sinners. After the sop, the devil enters.

Christ Himself works for hurt to desperate sinners. He is “a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence” (1Pe 2:8). He is so through the depravity of men’s hearts; for instead of believing in Him, they are offended at Him. The sun, though in its own nature pure and pleasant, yet it is hurtful to sore eyes. Jesus Christ is set for the fall, as the rising, of many (Luk 2:34). Sinners stumble at a Savior and pluck death from the tree of life. As chemical oils recover some patients but destroy others, so the blood of Christ: though to some it is medicine, to others it is condemnation. Here is the unparalleled misery of such as live and die in sin. The best things work for their hurt; cordials themselves kill.

5. See here the wisdom of God, Who can make the worst things imaginable turn to the good of the saints. He can by a divine chemistry extract gold out of dross. “O the depth...of the wisdom...of God!” (Rom 11:33). It is God’s great design to set forth the wonder of His wisdom. The Lord made Joseph’s prison a step to preferment.¹⁴ There was no way for Jonah to be saved but by being swallowed up. God suffered the Egyptians to hate Israel (Psa 106:41), and this was the means of their deliverance. The apostle Paul was bound with a chain, and that chain which did bind him was the means of enlarging the gospel (Phi 1:12). God enriches by impoverishing; He causes the augmentation¹⁵ of grace

¹³ **fly-blown** – contaminated.

¹⁴ **preferment** – advancement to an office or position.

¹⁵ **augmentation** – increase.

by the diminution¹⁶ of an estate. When the creature goes further from us, it is that Christ may come nearer to us. God works strangely. He brings order out of confusion, harmony out of discord. He frequently makes use of unjust men to do that which is just. “He is wise in heart” (Job 9:4). He can reap His glory out of men’s fury (Psa 76:10). Either the wicked shall not do the hurt that they intend, or they shall do the good that they do not intend. God often helps when there is least hope and saves His people in the way that they think will destroy. He made use of the high priest’s malice and Judas’ treason to redeem the world. Through indiscreet passion,¹⁷ we are apt to find fault with things that happen, which is as if an illiterate man should censure¹⁸ philosophy or a blind man find fault with the work in a landscape. “Vain man would be wise” (Job 11:12). Silly animals will be taxing providence¹⁹ and calling the wisdom of God to the bar of reason. God’s ways are “past finding out” (Rom 11:33). They are rather to be admired than fathomed. There is never a providence of God but has either a mercy or a wonder in it. How stupendous and infinite is that wisdom that makes the most adverse dispensations²⁰ work for the good of His children!

(6) Learn how little cause we have, then, to be discontented at outward trials and emergencies! What! Discontented at that which shall do us good? All things shall work for good. There are no sins God’s people are more subject to than unbelief and impatience. They are ready either to faint through unbelief or to fret through impatience. When men fly out against God by discontent and impatience, it is a sign [that] they do not believe this text. Discontent is an ungrateful sin because we have more mercies than afflictions; and it is an irrational sin because afflictions work for good. Discontent is a sin that puts us upon sin. “Fret not thyself...to do evil” (Psa 37:8). He that frets will be ready to do evil: fretting Jonah was sinning Jonah (Jon 4:9). The devil blows the coals of passion and discontent, and then warms himself at the fire. Oh, let us not nourish this angry viper in our breast. Let this text produce patience: “All things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom 8:28). Shall we be discontented at that which works for our good? If one friend should throw a bag of money at another, and in throwing it should graze his head, he would not be troubled much, seeing by this means he had got a bag of money. So, the Lord may

¹⁶ **diminution** – reduction.

¹⁷ **indiscreet passion** – unthinking, barely controllable emotions.

¹⁸ **censure** – criticize harshly.

¹⁹ **taxing providence** – charging God’s providence with wrongdoing.

²⁰ **dispensations** – divine acts and dealings.

bruise us by afflictions, but it is to enrich us. These afflictions work for us a weight of glory, and shall we be discontented?

7. See here that Scripture fulfilled: “God is good to Israel” (Psa 73:1). When we look upon adverse providences and see the Lord covering His people with ashes, making them drunk with wormwood (Lam 3:15), we may be ready to call in question the love of God and to say that He deals hardly with His people. But, oh no, God is good to Israel because He makes all things work for good. Is not He a good God, Who turns all to good? He works out sin and works in grace—is not this good? “We are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world” (1Co 11:32). The depth of affliction is to save us from the depth of damnation. Let us always justify God; when our outward condition is ever so bad, let us say, “Yet God is good.”

8. See what cause the saints have to be frequent in the work of thanksgiving. In this, Christians are defective. Though they are much in supplication,²¹ yet little in gratulation.²² The apostle says, “In everything give thanks” (1Th 5:18). Why so? Because God makes everything work for our good. We thank the physician, though he gives us a bitter medicine that makes us sick because it is to make us well. We thank any man that does us a good turn; shall we not be thankful to God Who makes everything work for good to us? God loves a thankful Christian. Job thanked God when He took all away: “The LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). Many will thank God when He gives: Job thanks Him when He takes away because he knew God would work good out of it. We read of saints with harps in their hands (Rev 14:2), an emblem of praise. We meet many Christians who have tears in their eyes and complaints in their mouths; but there are few with their harps in their hands who praise God in affliction. To be thankful in affliction is a work peculiar to a saint. Every bird can sing in spring, but some birds will sing in the dead of winter. Everyone, almost, can be thankful in prosperity, but a true saint can be thankful in adversity. A good Christian will bless God, not only at sunrise, but at sunset. Well may we, in the worst that befalls us, have a psalm of thankfulness because all things work for good. Oh, be much in blessing of God: we will thank Him that doth befriend us.

9. Think, if the worst things work for good to a believer, what shall the best things—Christ and heaven? How much more shall these work for good! If the cross has so much good in it, what has the crown? If

²¹ **supplication** – earnest, humble request.

²² **gratulation** – expression of gratitude.

such precious clusters grow in Golgotha, how delicious is that fruit which grows in Canaan? If there be any sweetness in the waters of Marah, what is there in the wine of Paradise? If God's rod has honey at the end of it, what has His golden scepter? If the bread of affliction tastes so savory, what is manna? What is the heavenly ambrosia? If God's blow and stroke work for good, what shall the smiles of His face do? If temptations and sufferings have matter of joy in them, what shall glory have? If there be so much good out of evil, what then is that good where there shall be no evil? If God's chastening mercies are so great, what will His crowning mercies be? "Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1Th 4:18).

10. Consider that if God makes all things to turn to our good, how right it is that we should make all things tend to His glory! "Do all to the glory of God" (1Co 10:31). The angels glorify God [as] they sing divine anthems of praise. How then ought man to glorify Him, for whom God has done more than for angels! He has dignified us above them in uniting our nature with the Godhead. Christ has died for us and not the angels. The Lord has given us not only out of the common stock of His bounty, but He has enriched us with covenant blessings: He has bestowed upon us His Spirit. He studies our welfare; He makes everything work for our good; free grace has laid a plan for our salvation. If God seeks our good, shall we not seek His glory?...

Thus, let us endeavor to make the name of God glorious and renowned. If God seek our good, let us seek His glory. If He makes all things tend to our edification, let us make all things tend to His exaltation. So much for the privilege mentioned in the text.

From *A Divine Cordial* (The Religious Tract Society, 1846), 59-70,
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Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686): English Nonconformist Puritan preacher and author; possibly born in Yorkshire, England, UK.



Providence is God's ordering all issues and events of things, after the counsel of His will to His own glory. I call providence God's ordering of things to distinguish it from His decrees: God's decree ordains things that shall fall out; God's providence ordereth them. I call providence the ordering of things after the counsel of God's will. God ordereth all events of things after the counsel of His will to His own glory, the glory of God being the ultimate end of all God's actions and the center where all the lines of providence do meet. The providence of God is the queen and governess of the world; it is the eye that sees and the hand that turns all the wheels in the universe.—*Thomas Watson*

PROVIDENCE & CONVERSION

John Flavel (c. 1630-1691)

IN nothing doth providence shine forth more gloriously in this world than it doth in this performance for the people of God!¹ How curiously soever its hand had molded your bodies, how tenderly soever it had preserved them, and how bountifully soever it had provided for them, if it had not also ordered some means or other for your conversion, all the former favors and benefits it had done for you would have signified little. This, oh, this is the most excellent benefit you ever received from its hand. You are more beholden² to it for this than for all your other mercies. And in opening this performance of providence, I cannot but think your hearts must be deeply affected. This is a subject that every gracious heart loves to steep its thoughts in. It is certainly the sweetest history that ever they repeated; they love to think and talk of it. The places where and instruments by whom this work was wrought are exceedingly endeared to them for the Word's sake: yea, endeared to that degree that, for many years after, their hearts have melted when they have but passed occasionally by those places, or but seen the faces of those persons that were used as instruments in the hand of providence for their good...O blessed places, times, and instruments! Oh, the deep, the sweet impressions—never to be erased out of the memory or heart—that this providence hath made upon those on whom it wrought this blessed effect at years of discretion and in a more sensible way!

But lest any poor soul should be discouraged under the display of this providence because he cannot remember the time, place, instruments, and manner wherein, and by which conversion-work was wrought, I will therefore premise this necessary distinction to prevent injury to some, whilst I design benefit to others.

Conversion, as to the subjects of it, may be considered two ways: either as it is more sensibly wrought in persons of riper years, who in their youthful days were more profane and vile; or upon persons in their tender years, into whose hearts grace was more insensibly and indiscernibly instilled by God's blessing upon pious education. In the former sort, the distinct acts of the Spirit, as illuminating, convincing,

¹ **EDITOR'S NOTE:** This article has been edited more than usual for smoother reading.

² **beholden** – owing thanks in return for help; indebted.

humbling, drawing them to Christ, and sealing them, are more evident and discernable. In the latter, [distinct acts of the Spirit are] more obscure and confused: they can remember that God gave them an esteem and liking of godly persons, care of duty, and conscience of sin; but as to the time, place, instruments, and manner of the work, they can give but a slender account of them. However, if the work be savingly wrought in them, there is no reason they should be troubled because the circumstances of it are not so evident to them as they are to others. Let the substance and reality of the work appear, and there is no reason to afflict yourselves because of the uncertainty of such circumstances.

But where the circumstances as well as substance are clear to a man—when we can call to remembrance the time when, the place where, the instrument by whom the work was wrought—it must needs be exceeding sweet. They cannot but yield a fresh delight to the soul every time they are reflected upon...Now, there are diverse things in those providences that are versant³ about this work, which are exceeding sweet and taking, namely,

The wonderful strangeness and unaccountableness of this work of providence in casting us into the way and ordering the occasions, yea, the minutest circumstances about this work. This you find in Acts 8:26-30 *ff.* The eunuch, at that very instant when he was reading the prophet Isaiah, hath an interpreter, one among a thousand that joins his chariot just as his mind was by a fit occasion prepared to receive the first light of the knowledge of Christ.

And how strange was that change—how far soever it went—upon Naaman the Syrian! It is recorded [in] 2 Kings 5:1-4 that the Syrians in their incursions⁴ should bring away this girl (likely her beauty was the inducement⁵). She must be presented to Naaman's wife and relate to her the power of God that accompanied the prophet Elisha, though you find in that case there had never been an instance given before (Luk 4:27). Doubtless, the whole of this affair was guided by the signal direction of providence:

So, for the conversion of the Samaritans, it is observed in John 4:4 [that] Christ must needs go that way, i.e., it lay just in the road between Judea and Galilee. At the sixth hour, i.e., high noon, He rests Himself upon Jacob's well, still seeming to have no other design but His own refreshment by sitting and drinking there. But oh, what a train of

³ **versant** – familiar.

⁴ **incursions** – hostile invasions; sudden attacks.

⁵ **inducement** – attraction.

blessed providences follow this, which seemed but an accidental thing! First, the woman of Samaria and then many more in that city are brought to believe in Christ, as you find in verses 29 and 41.

The accompanying of others in a neighborly civil visit hath been overruled to the same end. Thus, many of the Jews accompanied Mary unto Bethany, designing only to manifest their civil respect; but there they met Christ, saw the things that He did, and believed on Him (Joh 11:45).

The committing of a godly man to prison hath been the method of providence to save the soul of a poor keeper. So, Paul was made a prisoner to make his keeper a spiritual freeman (Act 16:27).

The scattering of ministers and Christians by persecution from cities and towns into the ignorant and barbarous parts of the country hath been the way of providence to find out and bring home some lost sheep that were found there to Jesus Christ (Act 8:1, 4). The like signal event hath since followed upon the like scattering of godly ministers, whereof there are many pregnant instances this day.

A servant running away from his master—likely upon no other design but to live an idle life—yet falling into such places and companies as providence ordered in a design to him unknown, hath thereby been brought to be the servant of Christ. This was the very case of Onesimus, who ran away from his master Philemon to Rome. There, by a strange providence, possibly a mere curiosity to see the prisoners, he falls into Paul's hands who begat him to Christ in his bonds (Phm 1:10-16).

Thus, Paul and Timothy—a sweet and lovely pair—when they were travelling through Phrygia and Galatia, were forbidden to preach the word in Asia, to which probably their minds inclined (Act 16:6). And when they attempted to go into Bithynia, the Spirit suffered them not (Act 16:7). But a man of Macedonia, i.e., an angel in the shape or habit of a man of that country, appeared to Paul in a vision and prayed him, saying, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us” (Act 16:9). And there did God open the heart of Lydia.

Oh, how unsearchable are the ways of providence in leading men to Christ! And now suffer me to reason a little with thy soul. Reader, hast thou been duly sensible of thy obligation to providence for this priceless favor? Oh, what hath He done for thee! There are diverse kinds of mercies conveyed to men by the hand of providence, but none like this; in all the treasury of its benefits, none is found like this. Did it cast thee into the way of conversion and order the means and occasions of it for thee when thou little thoughtest of any such thing? How dear and

sweet should the remembrance of it be to thy soul! I think it should astonish and melt you every time you reflect upon it! Such mercies should never grow stale or look like common things to you. Seriously consider the following particulars:

How surprising the mercy was that it performed for you in that day.

Providence had a design upon you for your eternal good, which you understood not: the time of mercy was now fully come. The decree was now ready to bring forth that mercy with which it had gone big from eternity, and its gracious design must be executed by the hand of providence so far as concerned the external means and instruments. How aptly did it cause all things to fall in with that design, though you knew not the meaning of it! Look over all the before mentioned examples, and you shall see the blessed work of conversion begun upon those souls when they minded it no more than Saul did a kingdom that morning he went out to seek his father's asses (1Sa 9:3, 20). Providence might truly have said to you in that day, as Christ said to Peter, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter" (Joh 13:7). God's thoughts are not as our thoughts; but "as the heavens are higher than the earth," so are His thoughts higher than ours and His ways than our ways (Isa 55:9). Little did Zacchaeus think, when he climbed up into the sycamore tree to see Christ as He passed that way, what a design of mercy Christ had upon him. Jesus took thence the occasion of becoming both his guest and Savior (Luk 19:5-8).

And as little did some of you think what the aim of providence was when you went—some out of custom, others out of curiosity, if not worse ends—to hear a sermon. Oh, how stupendous are the ways of God! What a distinguishing and seasonable mercy was ushered in by providence in that day! It brought you to the means of salvation in a good hour. At that very point of time when the angel troubled the waters, you were brought to the pool (Joh 5:4). Now the accepted day was come, the Spirit was in the ordinance or providence that converted you, and you were set in the way of it. It may be that you had heard many hundred sermons before, but nothing would stick until now because the hour was not come. The Lord did, as it were, call in the word for such a man, such a woman; and providence said, "Lord, here he is! I have brought him before Thee." There were many others under that sermon that received no such mercy. You yourselves have heard many before but not to advantage; as it is said, "Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian" (Luk 4:27). So, there were many poor unconverted souls besides you under the Word that day, and it may be to none of

them was salvation sent that day but to you. Oh, blessed providence that set you in the way of mercy at that time!

What a weighty and important mercy was providentially directed to your souls that day! There are mercies of all sizes and kinds in the hands of providence to dispense to the sons of men...but among them all, this is the chiefest: to lead and direct them to Christ. For consider: (1) Of all mercies, this comes through most and greatest difficulties (Eph 1:19-20). (2) This is a spiritual mercy, excelling in dignity of nature all others more than *gold* excels the *dirt* under your feet (Rev 3:18). One such gift is worth thousands of other mercies. (3) This mercy immediately flowing out of the fountain of God's *electing love*, a mercy never dropped into any but an elect vessel (1Th 1:4-5). (4) This is a mercy that infallibly secures salvation: for as we may argue from conversion to election, looking back; so, from conversion to salvation, looking forward (Heb 6:9). (5) This is an eternal mercy, that which will stick by you when father, mother, wife, children, estate, honor, health, and life shall fail thee (Joh 4:14).

Oh, therefore, set a special mark upon that providence that set you in the way of this mercy! It hath performed for thee what all the ministers on earth and angels in heaven could never have performed. This is a mercy that puts weight and value into the smallest circumstance that relates to it.

From *The Whole Works of the Reverend John Flavel*, Vol. 4 (London: Baynes & Son, 1820), 376-387; in the public domain.

John Flavel (c. 1630-1691): English Presbyterian and minister; born at Bromagrove, Worcester, England, UK.



There is infinite variety of the works of God in an ordinary providence, and yet all work in an ordinary way...God in the way of His providence causes a thousand thousand things, one to depend upon another. There are infinite separate wheels (as I may so say) in the works of providence, all the works that ever God did from all eternity or ever will do. He put them all together, and all make up but one work, and they have been as separate wheels that have had their orderly motion to attain the end that God from all eternity hath appointed. We indeed look at things by pieces. We look at one particular and do not consider the reference that one thing hath to another; but God looks at all things at once and sees the reference that one thing hath to another. As a child that looks upon a clock looks first upon one wheel and then upon another wheel, he looks not at all together or the dependance that one hath upon another. But the workman hath his eyes upon all together and sees the dependance of all one upon another. [He] sees the art that there is in the dependance one upon another. So it is in God's providence.—*Jeremiah Burroughs*

THE LORD GOD OMNIPOTENT

Thomas Reade (1776-1841)

AT the creation, amid the darkness of chaos, Jehovah said: “Let there be light: and there was light” (Gen 1:3). When veiled in human flesh, He commanded the raging wind and waves, saying: “Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm” (Mar 4:39). To His tempest-tossed people, He now speaks these composing words: “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psa 46:10)—and they find rest unto their souls. In violent public commotions, God can still the madness of the people; and in inward mental agonies, He can calm the agitated spirit. “When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him? whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only” (Job 34:29).

When we read the history of past ages and consider the ever-changing scene before us; when we study man and perceive though but a small portion of the passions and contending interests which shake the fabric of society—how delightful, how composing to the mind, is this all-gracious declaration: “Be still, and know that I am God”!

The political world, like the air and sea that surround us, is ever in motion; but the happy believer finds his rest in God. In the present day, the human mind seems to be acted upon in a most remarkable manner. Knowledge is diffusing its light in every direction, and the intellectual powers are acquiring an expansion, which their ancient boundaries can neither limit nor control. The Christian world is all awake to the spiritual and moral degradation of mankind and is laboring to disseminate the sacred truths of revelation, which alone can raise our fallen race.

The enemies of the gospel and of social order are alike awake to their deeds of darkness. There is, therefore, at the present eventful period, an evident struggle between light and darkness. The struggle may be violent, but the believer hears the cheering voice from heaven, which dissipates every rising fear: “Be still, and know that I am God.”

Oh, my soul, rejoice that the Lord reigns! He can calm the rough surges of the mind. He can bid the inward tempest cease. He can pour an enlivening ray upon the drooping heart and cause a sweet serenity and peace to reign within. Trust in the Lord always. Be still, and know that He is God.

There is something peculiarly soothing to the heart of a pious Christian to know that He Who rules over all worlds, in Whose hands are the destinies of nations, and Who guides the minutest concerns of families and individuals, is his Father and his friend. The more we know of God, of His power, wisdom, love, faithfulness, and truth, the more we shall bow before His throne in humble adoration and filial confidence and love.

To know God in Christ, to know Him as a covenant God, to know Him as our God, is to possess all the sources and secrets of true peace amid surrounding storms and tempests. This knowledge will raise us above the agitated elements of the world and place us in that pure region where the soul can breathe more freely and expand her powers more fully. Faith views with admiration the perfections of Jehovah. Hope rests the fulfillment of her expectations on these perfections. Love delights in them and gradually assimilates the soul to them, while patience calmly waits, under every changing dispensation, for that abundant harvest of rich blessings, which the God of truth has promised and which His faithfulness will perform.

Come, then, O my soul, and learn from this view of your privileges the blessedness of trusting in God, “with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (Jam 1:17). All His promises are yea and amen. All His ways are righteous and true. Cast your care upon Him Who cares for you; and under every trying event, be still, and know that He is God.

It is truly animating to reflect that, while everything seems given to change, the Almighty has declared: “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Isa 46:10). “I change not” (Mal 3:6). The purposes of God are moving steadily and directly towards their fulfillment. Many things, according to our shortsightedness, appear to thwart His designs. Persecutors arise and cut off His most zealous servants. Death seizes eminent laborers in His vineyard. Unforeseen circumstances spring up and appear to check the progress of the gospel. Hence, we are ready to exclaim with David: “Let me not fall into the hand of man” (2Sa 24:14). But is not this the language of despondency, the language of a soul looking through a dark and gloomy medium? Man never had and never shall have the upper hand. David was in a right frame when he sang: “The LORD reigneth” (Psa 96:10). This is the triumphant song of the redeemed above: “Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth” (Rev 19:6).

Nothing can happen without the divine will and permission. The Almighty sees the end from the beginning. Unto Him are known all

His works and all events from eternal ages. He has firmly laid His eternal plans of goodness, justice, and mercy. All things serve Him. "The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil" (Pro 16:4).

Can anything, then, unforeseen, strike across His purposes or derange His plans? Can any man who is crushed before the moth, the creature of a day, turn aside the grand machine of providence, whose constant wheels revolve their everlasting rounds? Ah, no! As everything respecting the eternal purposes of Jehovah springs from His own will, so everything shall terminate in His own glory. Higher and farther than this, we cannot go. "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last" (Rev 22:13). Clouds and darkness may surround the throne of the Eternal and veil His bright designs, but faith can pierce the veil and view, beyond this darkening scene, the rising glories of Emmanuel's kingdom.

How great, then, is the blessedness of true religion! How highly privileged is the child of God! As nothing can happen without the divine permission, so everything shall work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28).

Satan may rage, the world may frown, the flesh may rebel, and providence may seem to cross the humble believer; but, notwithstanding all this tempest, his soul is safe, being "hid with Christ in God" (Col 3:3). He may "groan, being burdened" (2Co 5:4); yet still he can rejoice. He looks through the curtain of time, which hangs over the glories of eternity; and in joyful expectation of soon entering within the veil, he endures with much patience the trials of this transitory state.

Not so the worldling. He knows no joys but those of sense, or those perhaps of a more refined nature, flowing from intellectual pursuits. But in respect of heavenly pleasures, arising from communion with his Savior and a delightful foretaste of future bliss, he is an utter stranger. To him, "the future is a dark unknown." His views are indistinct and dim when he reads or hears of joys forever flowing from those sources that are now the objects of his unvarying dislike.

What happiness can arise from the contemplation of being eternally with Jesus when prayer and meditation are now irksome and insipid to him? What happiness from the idea of being made like Jesus when holiness is offensive to him, or from the consideration of beholding His glory when the splendors of this world have far more powerful attractions to him?

It is true [that] he prefers heaven to hell as a choice of two evils; but he secretly disbelieves the Word of revelation and therefore hopes that hell has no existence and that death is an eternal sleep. If he is not thus far advanced in infidelity, yet he flatters himself that God will be more lenient and merciful than His own Word declares Him to be. Thus, he ventures upon the dreadful step of putting the truth of God to its most awful test and passes through death to learn by tremendous experience the madness of his unbelief!

Happy, thrice happy, is the man who receives with childlike simplicity the Word of God and acts upon it. He sees God in everything and can feed upon the hidden manna. He finds the promises to be full of truth and comfort. On them, as on a rock, he rests in safety. With wonder he beholds the raging tempest, which, sweeping over the nations of the earth, clears away deep-rooted prejudices and prepares a smoother path for the chariot of the everlasting gospel.

He knows that glorious days are hastening on and therefore is not discouraged, though they be preceded by a stormy night. He hears the voice of his almighty Father speaking in gracious accents to allay his fears, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psa 46:10), and he is kept in perfect peace.

Come, then, O my soul, and take courage. Fear not the face nor the frown of man. The Lord reigns, be the earth ever so unquiet. Sing with David, unite with Luther, and say: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psa 46:1). Do not be dismayed at the troubles of the earth. Tremble not at the convulsions of empires. Only fear God; only believe in His promises; only love and serve Him; and all things shall work together for your good, as they assuredly will for His glory.

Life is hastening quickly away. Eternity is at the door. Live, then, for eternity, and leave with God the concerns of time. Leave in His hands the safety of His church and the security of His cause. Cleave to Him with childlike simplicity. Seek His glory. Aim at perfection. Look high and look forward; and soon you shall be removed out of the reach of evil and be placed securely in the paradise above!

From *Spiritual Exercises of the Heart*, Reformation Heritage Books,
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Thomas Reade (1776-1841): English layman and author; born in Manchester, England, UK.

