

# DIVINE PROVIDENCE

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The Bible doctrine of divine providence has been neglected by gospel preachers of our generation. In days gone by this subject was given a more prominent place in the preaching and writing of brethren. I believe we have reaped some tragic consequences because of our ignorance on this subject. Extremes have arisen and found fertile soil in which to grow because of the ignorance that exists. One example is the "direct" operation of the Holy Spirit movement. I do not believe false teaching on this subject would have found such ready acceptance by some if they had understood God's providential working. Another consequence of not understanding this subject is the gloom, depression and anxiety that afflict the hearts of so many of the children of God. If they could only understand this Bible doctrine and have the conviction that *"the Lord is at hand"* (near – Philippians 4:5), and that He really cares for us (I Peter 5:7). This would do away with the insecurity, fear, depression, and despair that exist in the hearts of so many.

In order to define what divine providence is, let us first point out what it is not. Divine providence is not a miracle. A miracle is an act of God superseding or suspending a natural law. A miracle was a visible sign which indicated to all men that a super-human power was at work in that particular thing. An example of a miracle is the Lord feeding five thousand people with five loaves and two fishes (John 6: 8 ó 14). Miracles were for the purpose of confirming the word (Mark 16: 17 ó 20). The word was given in its completeness and confirmed, then miracles ceased (I Corinthians 13: 8 ó 13).

Providence differs from a miracle in that its ends are brought about by means of the established laws of God through ordinary channels. Providence is the preservation, care and government which God exercises over all things that He has created in order that they may accomplish the end for which they were created.

God's providence does not eliminate following the word of God in every detail. God, through His word, brings about conversion and edification of His people. (Romans 1:16; Acts 20: 32). This does not eliminate our using all the care, sense and skill that we can exercise. Neither does it eliminate the free moral agency of man. God's providence works with two kinds of wills ó willing wills and opposing wills. Good men suffer many times at the hands of evil men ó evil men meaning it for evil ó but God in His providence can overrule it for the good of the innocent. Joseph, in the Old Testament, is a good example of God overruling the evil intent and actions of his brothers for good. Joseph said to his brothers, *"But as for you, ye thought evil against me; But God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."* (Genesis 50:20). The psalmist said, *"He (God) sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant."* (Psalms 105: 17). This example of Joseph is a good commentary on Romans 8:28, *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose."* This verse does not mean that everything that happens to a Christian is good within itself, but that God, through His providence, can ultimately overrule even the bad for our good. He did this for Joseph, why deny He can do it for us?

Let us look at scriptural proof of divine providence: God makes the sun to rise and send the rain and fruitful seasons (Matthew 5:45; Acts 14:17); in God we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28); God gives rain, makes the grass to grow and feeds the beasts and ravens (Psalms 147: 8 ó 9), God knows when a sparrow falls to the ground (Matthew 10:29; Luke 12:6); God knows every hair on our head ( Luke 12:7); God's eyes are over the righteous and His ears are open to their prayers ( I Peter 3:12); God rules in the affairs of nations, *"the most High ruleth in the kingdoms of men, and giveth it to whomsoever"*

*he will.*” (Daniel 4:25); John said that Christ was “*the prince of the kings of the earth*” (Revelation 1:5); Paul said, “*For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God*” (Romans 13:1). These verses should prove to any honest man that God is providentially working in the world today.

It is upon the belief in God’s providence that prayer is founded. We pray because we believe that God will hear our prayers and that He has the power to grant our petitions through His providence. He does not answer our prayers with miracles ó but through His providence ó working through His established laws and ordinary channels. We pray for doors to be opened through which we can enter to preach the gospel (Colossians 4:3; I Corinthians 16: 9; II Corinthians 2:12), and God opens these doors through His providence in answer to our prayers. We pray for our daily food (Matthew 6:11); we labor with our hands (Ephesians 4:28); and God will provide our needs through His providence. We pray for the sick (James 5: 14 ó 18), and God heals the sick, providentially. We pray that we may not be led into temptation and for God to deliver us from temptation (Matthew 6:13; I Corinthians 10:13; Matthew 26: 41); and God, through His providence, will make a way of escape in answer to our prayer; but we must use the way of escape. God will not deliver a man from temptation unless that man wills Him to do so. We, as God’s people, need to have faith that the Lord is at hand, not afar off (Philippians 4:5 ó 6; Jeremiah 23: 23 - 24), and that we in everything can make our requests known to God and He will providentially answer our prayers ( I John 5: 14 ó 15).

Jesus give proof of divine providence to the Christian in Matthew 6: 24 ó 34. In verse 25 of this chapter He tells us to take no thought (or be not anxious) for our lives, about what we will eat, drink, or put on. He tells that God, who gave us our lives and our bodies, will give us food and raiment. Jesus is not teaching laziness here. We are to work, doing our best (Ephesians 4:28), then leave the rest to God. In verse 26 Jesus tells us to “*behold the fowls of the air,*” that God feeds them; and we are of much more value than fowls; so God will feed and take care of us. In verse 7 Jesus says that worry will not add one cubit to our stature; so to worry about what we are going to eat, drink or wear is needless because God will provide it through His providence. In verses 28 ó 30 He shows how foolish it is to worry about raiment; if God clothes the lilies of the field He will most assuredly clothe us. In verses 31 and 32 He tells us that God knows we have need of food, drink and clothing; so we are not to worry about them like the Gentiles do because we know that God will supply them. Jesus then gives the Christian the proper course to pursue in verse 33: “*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness*” and God, through His providence, will supply our temporal needs. He said, “*Take therefore no thought for the morrow*” (verse 34), because God will providentially care for us.

Christian friend, faith in God’s providential care will take the worry out of our lives. All who walk by faith take God at His word and sincerely believe that the things He has promised He is able to perform (Romans 4:21). Do you believe that God works through His providence today? Too many Christians have “*little faith*” (Matthew 6:30) in God’s providential care. We all need more faith that “*his eyes are over the righteous and His ears are open to their prayers*” (Philippians 4:5); and we can cast our cares upon Him for He does care for us (I Peter 5:7).

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