

## Faith in the Providence of God

(Compiled by Paul R Blake)

At one end of the truck terminal where H. H. Lee worked for many years was a coal company. On the other side of the fence from the coal yard was a large bend in a railroad where each day several freight trains passed by. Lee noticed that the owner of the coal company went out each day and threw a couple of buckets of chunk coal over the fence at various places along the track. One day he walked over and asked the man why he did that.

He replied, "An elderly woman lives across the street, and I know that her pension is inadequate to buy enough coal to heat her home. For years when the trains would pass, she would walk along and pick up the pieces of coal she thinks have fallen from the coal car behind the engine as the trains rounded the curve. She doesn't realize that diesel electric engines replaced steam locomotives years ago. I don't want to disappoint her, so I just throw some pieces over the fence."

The book of Ruth illustrates this principle of godly people becoming the means whereby God often exercises providence in this world. When Boaz saw Ruth gathering grain behind the reapers in his field, he commanded them to leave some handfuls of grain for her. To her, this was a blessing from the Lord. Ruth 2:15 - "And when she rose up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. Also let grain from the bundles fall purposely for her; leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her."

In the same way, the people whose lives we touch experience God's care through our compassion and generosity. That's why we should ask God to make us aware of opportunities to show kindness and follow through with action. In so doing, we become an effective tool in the hand of providence.

In the normal course of providence, God works in and through His creation, not in spite of it. For this reason, some answers to prayer are difficult to prove with certainty. C. S. Lewis wrote, "Only faith vouches for the connection. No empirical proof could establish it." We believe a prayer has been answered not because of any scientific criteria proving it, but because we have faith.

Most of the ways we interact with God, through nature, the Bible, the Lord's Supper, the church, other Christians, include things we can touch. God's own state, though, is the realm of spirit. Prayer reflects that difference between us and connects our material world with His spiritual gifts.

Although we may ask God to intervene directly, it should not surprise us if He responds in a more hidden way in cooperation with our own choices. An alcoholic prays, "Lord, keep me from drink today." The answer to that prayer will likely come from the inside, from a stiffening of his resolve or an intervention by a loyal friend, rather than from some marvel like the magical disappearance of liquor bottles from a cabinet.

However God intervenes on our behalf, we trust His character. We see a true partnership with One who has our well-being at heart. As poet Ramsey wrote:  
"Help me to walk aright,  
More by faith, less by sight"

Matt. 6:25-26 - "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

Rom. 8:31-32 - "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

Trust the Lord to care for us. The means and method are less important than the outcome; that is, our souls will be preserved until we are at home in heaven.

2Tim. 4:18 - "And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!"