

God and Providence

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

- A. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of God's care
 - 1. For the birds of the air and the lilies of the field - Matt. 6:26-29
 - 2. For those who seek first the kingdom of God - Matt. 6:30-33
- B. Jesus was talking about the Providential care of God
 - 1. In ways that demonstrates His love for His creatures
 - 2. In ways that are not necessarily miraculous or supernatural, but rather manifests His foresight in setting up the laws of the nature of this world
- C. God's Providence is often misunderstood.

I. THE DEFINITION OF PROVIDENCE

- A. The word "provide" (from Latin providere) means "to foresee" (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia)
 - 1. The corresponding Greek word, pronoia, means "forethought" - *ibid.*
 - 2. The Greek word is found only twice in the Scriptures, translated "foresight" (providence, KJV), and applied to Felix - Acts 24:2
 - a. Translated "provision" in Rom. 13:14
 - 3. While the word providence is not used in scripture, the principle of providence permeates the word of God.
- B. The principle
 - 1. Forethought and foresight imply a future end, a goal and a definitive plan for attaining that end - ISBE
 - 2. The word "providence" has come to be used to signify the preparation, care, and supervision necessary to secure a desired future result (*ibid.*)
 - 3. Literally means foresight, but is generally used to denote God's preservation and governance over all things by means of secondary causes (Easton)
 - 4. While miraculous acts of God can be described as providential, the concept of providence is generally used to describe His care through natural means
 - 5. Believers often wish to see direct Divine interaction in their lives.
 - a. In this uncertain, unsafe, and often unpleasant world, we want to see a personal, powerful, active force protecting us
 - b. God has instead showed His eternal, infinite foresight and wisdom in arranging matters in this world in such a way as to provide for our needs
 - c. God takes care of birds, not by throwing worms and seeds in their nests, but by designing them to be perfectly suited to find worms and seeds.
 - 6. His design of humankind is no less wondrous in foresight and wisdom

II. THE DESCRIPTION OF PROVIDENCE

- A. General Providence

1. The widespread care and supervision which God exercises over His created universe is commonly designated as general Providence which embraces alike the evil and the good (ISBE).
 - a. Special Providence - The Scriptures teach that there is an additional, special care over the lives of the spiritually good that is not given to the wicked who do not fear God
 2. God's general Providence extends to:
 - a. The natural world - Psalm 104:14, 135:5-7; Acts 14:17
 - b. The animal world - Psalm 104:21-29; Matt. 6:26, 10:29
 - c. The affairs of men in general - Job 12:23; Dan. 2:21
 3. Matt. 5:44-45
- B. Special Providence
1. There is a more special and particular providence which He exercises on behalf of the good, those whose wills are in harmony with Divine will
 - a. God's general providence is special in that it deals with all the minute details of the existence of every creature, and it is always and everywhere active (ibid).
 - b. The Scriptures teach that there is an additional, special care over the lives of the spiritually good that is not given to the wicked who do not fear God
 - c. Psalm 37:23-25; Prov. 3:5-26; Matt. 6:33; Rom. 8:28
 2. Regarding the special Providence of God
 - a. Ultimate end sought is His children's spiritual, not material good
 - 1) Material blessings may come to one as a result of special Providence
 - 2) Yet God may also allow financial hardship, illness, or physical trials to occur if He considers them necessary for our spiritual benefit - Rom. 5:3-4; James 1:2-4
 - b. We should not assume all things are the result of special Providence
 - 1) Some things occur as random accident - Ecc. 9:11
 - 2) Too many credit or blame God for every good or ill in life
 - 3) Some things occur because the Adversary still exerts a very real influence (Job?) - 1Peter 5:8-9
 - 4) Some things occur because this world is populated by evil men (drunken driver) - Psalm 140:1-5
 - 5) Of course, God's special providence helps us overcome such evil - Rom. 8:35-39
 - c. Special providence and man's cooperation
 - 1) Promise of God's care does not mean that we need not take action
 - 2) We must both pray and work for our food - Matt. 6:11; 2Thes. 3:10; 1Tim. 5:8
 - 3) We must work out our salvation, while God helps us - Phil. 2:12-13; 1Peter 3:10-12
 3. How can I know whether something is coincidental or Providential?
 - a. If you are truly grateful and thank God for all of the blessings in your life, is it necessary to know? All things are of God.

III. THE DETERMINATION OF PROVIDENCE

A. The need for caution

1. Many are quick to interpret anything as an indication of God's judgment
 - a. If something bad happens, those who suffer it must be wicked
 - b. If something good happens, those who experience it must be righteous
2. Yet the Bible reveals that there many exceptions
 - a. Bad things often happen to the righteous (Job, martyrs)
 - b. Good things often happen to the wicked - Psalm 73:3-12; Job 21:7-13
3. We cannot always be certain whether something is providential
 - a. A series of events may be coincidental or happenstance
 - b. We can easily misread what happens and come to the wrong conclusion
 - c. The danger is even greater if we are ignorant of the Scriptures
 - d. We might conclude something to be right (because it seems successful), when it may be contrary to God's word

B. The right approach to Providence

1. Possess the perspective of Mordecai - Esther 4:14
 - a. He wondered whether Esther had been placed in her position by God, but he did not presume such was actually the case
2. Accept the possibility the Lord's will and wisdom may differ from ours
 - a. Rom. 1:10; Acts 18:21; James 4:15
 - b. We can only be certain in things pertaining to the Scriptures
3. In everything give thanks - Phil. 4:6
 - a. For the good things that come our way
 - b. For the ill things too, as they can be used for our spiritual growth
4. Leave the ultimate determination of providence to God
 - a. We need not "whittle on His end of the stick"
 - b. We can believe in God's Providence without needing to recognize every occurrence. It is not necessary for our faith
5. In part two we will examine the relationship between God's providence and our faith in prayer.

Conclusion:

1. The providence of God is a wonderful blessing
 - a. We know that He is working toward our ultimate good, the salvation of our souls
 - b. His care has already provided what we need, and often far beyond our desires
2. To ensure God's providential working for our ultimate good:
 - a. Seek first the kingdom of God
 - b. Study and apply what God has revealed
 - c. Make plans that are subject to the Lord's will
 - d. In everything give God thanks - 1Peter 3:10-12