

DIVINE PROVIDENCE

We sometimes sing a well-known hymn by Joseph Addison,
When all Thy mercies, O my God, My rising soul surveys,
Transported with the view, I'm lost In wonder, love and praise.
Thy **Providence** my life sustained, And all my wants redressed,
While in the silent womb I lay, And hung upon the breast.

William Cowper, - another hymnwriter, - was often given to depression and yet he wrote some of the most beautiful hymns,
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning **providence** He hides a smiling face.

Providence *is not* the religious word for luck or fortune. It is not something that *might* come your way or might not. Simply set out ... in providence God preserves and governs His creation so that it will accomplish all He made it to achieve.

If you didn't believe in Divine Providence I cannot see or understand how you can have any basis for your faith. Divine Providence is the doctrine of Scripture that teaches God does all things for His glory and ultimately for the good and benefit of His people.

God can do absolutely anything but He only does that which is in accordance with His decrees that emanate from His Providential will. ... This, - as is anything to do with the Nature and Person of God, - is a *massive* subject that no matter how much you say about it you would never even be able to adequately 'scratch the surface'. But here are just three simple headings to help you to think just a little bit clearer and systematically about this subject of **God's Providence** that is so central to our faith.

GOD'S PROVIDENCE directs us to have CONFIDENCE in Him.

- * When you are standing on ground that seems it might be ready to give way at any moment this doctrine calls upon you to realise that underneath you and all around you are the everlasting arms of the Almighty God.

- * ... The Lord spoke to Job out of the whirlwind, 38:11 *Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.* Here and no further! “God holds the keys of all unknown and I am glad!”
- * It’s not simply that God *knows* the paths you take; but the Word of God says He *directs* your paths. You don’t stumble on to them and then He works something out accordingly ... in some sort of a reaction to get you out of the mess you got yourself into. No, He is not a God of *reaction* ... He is a God of *direction*! Ps. 135:6 *Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.*
- * He will not guide you along paths that will completely envelope you, or into which you will sink and never be seen again.
- * He allows happenings in your life for reasons that, - at this point in time, - may only be known to Him. You can’t understand why the burden of your heartache is so heavy, but *He* understands and He has promised He would never leave you or forsake you.
- * When David was hiding from Saul in a cave at En-Gedi he felt God’s presence, he wrote Ps. 142, *I cried unto the LORD with my voice; with my voice unto the LORD did I make my supplication. 2 I poured out my complaint before him; I showed before him my trouble. 3 When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me. 4 I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. 5 I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living. 6 Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I. 7 Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.*
- * When Paul was sailing on that ship on the way to the island of Malta he addressed the crew, Acts 27:21 *Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. 22 And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. 23 For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, 24 Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. 25 Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. 26 Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.*

- * This is not ‘fatalism’ ... where the unbeliever says ‘if it’s going to happen it will happen’. No, this is **God’s providence** that brings **confidence** in Him ... for *he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold (Job 23:10).* ...

GOD’S PROVIDENCE directs us to have COURAGE in Him.

- * **Confidence** and **courage** are very closely related ... but courage is surely an *outworking* and the evidence of being confident.
- * Oh yes, I *believe* what you’re saying; ... but courage is being able to rely upon that belief.
- * The *Confession* says, “Nothing happens by chance or outside the sphere of God’s providence”. What God plans, He executes ... He always brings to pass.
- * God, if you like, is the controlling factor behind all things.
 - * When the early Christians were *mauled* by the lions in the Circus Maximus and torched along the Appian Way ...
 - * When the Reformers and martyrs were beheaded and burned at the stake ...
 - * When the two young Covenanter women were tied to a wooden pole on the sands of the Moray Firth and they drowned as the tide came in ...
- * Yes, ... we have got to say it! ... God’s will and God’s decree was in action ... and these men and women who were tremendous testimonies of grace God imparted to them **courage** to withstand the hour.
- * When I had meningitis, along with the fears that such an illness brings ... no matter how hard it would have been, Pearl and I would have understood the words that Eli said to young Samuel, *I Sam 3:18 It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good.*
- * It can be hard, it can be difficult, it can shatter your world ... but even when this world is shattered the child of God has the **confidence** in the providential care of God that directs him/her to have courage in our God.
- * You know, it’s one thing saying these things when all is going well ... but the strength of this subject of **God’s providence** is surely borne out when you have nothing to hold on to *but* this truth.

- * Some of the most beautiful trophies of grace have shone all the more in times of great affliction ... and how did they shine so brightly? ... because of their **confidence** and **courage** in God's providential care. ... Then also ...

GOD'S PROVIDENCE directs us to have CONTENTMENT in Him.

- * **Confidence, courage, contentment**, - these three words share much more than simply their two opening letters. These three words are grounded upon our understanding of the Sovereignty of God in all things.
- * The Psalmist says, 103:8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. 9 He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. 10 He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. 12 As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. ... Ps. 121:3 He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. 4 Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. 5 The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. 6 The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. 7 The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. 8 The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.
- * This isn't 'luck' or 'good fortune' or anything else the world wants to call it. No matter what they say, the world is not out of God's control.
- * Even in the midst of anarchy, - religious, political or anything else, - *God has His finger on the pulse of this world!*
- * Job wept in his pain, 19:26 though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: 27 Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another.
- * The supreme example is our Saviour, Is. 53:11 He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and shall be satisfied*: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.
- * Paul wrote, I Cor. 13:13 There hath no temptation taken you but *such as is common to man*: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

- * Where is the solace or contentment alcohol or drugs can bring? They can offer nothing that lasts ... but the **contentment** the child of God knows is in the **confidence** that God knows all things, and God does all things well.
- * It's the **contentment** when you sit at the bedside of someone who is dying, and you read to them from the Scriptures, and you pray with them and you see that even in the midst of pain, suffering and heartache there abides a **contentment** that is not of this world.
- * Many a time I come away with such a sense of gratitude that God called me into the ministry to be with such people that He, - in His Providence, - is holding tightly in His grasp.
 - * There are often discouragements some professing members of the church family bring ... but it is a joy to be with a saint soundly saved, - **confident** and **courageous**, and **content** ... just on the brink of entering into eternity with God.

Conclusion

- * What good is doctrine if it is not relevant to your faith and your daily walk? I hope you see that the doctrine of **Divine Providence** is a living article of faith.
- * It is not 'pie in the sky' ... but the realistic way God's people are privileged to live.
- * As it says, God hardens the hearts of some while, - with the same Gospel, - He softens the hearts of others. He *abandons* some, - He rejects them, - while others He saves.
- * This subject is as vast as eternity; try to understand it and put it into a body of words that would satisfy man's craving for knowledge and you'll rob it of its mystery.
- * It is simply what the Bible says, - the Book of instruction that God has had written. To the believer who trusts in its truth this doctrine of Divine Providence is the basis of our **confidence**, our **courage** and our **contentment**.