

December 29, 2000

## The Providence of God

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

This has indeed been an eventful year for me and my family. As with each of you, when things like the year 2000 has brought about for us come along, we are very tempted to question God over the whole situation. I must confess that Job has crossed my mind more than a few times, and in the difficulties of life, sometimes it is good to reread his story.

I want to take a test at the Whitfield Seminary as the Lord provides the time and money. It is a program that has a 400 essay question test, and they grade your college level according to the outcome. It is designed for people who have been in the ministry for some time, and will provide a degree if that level is achieved, or show where work is needed. However, when the president of the school read all my material I sent to him, he told me that all I need to do is take a general survey test of all the books of the Bible. The seminary required reading about 8 books, and I was able to obtain all but 2.

The title of one of those books was *Basic Christian Doctrine*, and one chapter in it was on the divine providence of God. It was an excellent treatment of this sometimes confusing doctrine, and it encouraged me to put together a message along that line. And with all the events of this past year, here at the end of 2000 is a good time to offer this message to you.

As I read the chapter on Divine Providence, my heart was encouraged to continue on in the face of all the discouragement that can come our way. I hope that I can share some of this encouragement with you today.

One of the things that has keep me going this past year has been the continuing idea of the Divine Providence of God being in control of all those events. As a Christian, I find as much, if not more, hope in this doctrine that in any one other doctrine in all the word of God.

Though the word **Providence** is not found in Scripture, the doctrine is clearly Scriptural. There is an overwhelm number of passages that **clearly teach God s control** of all things for His own glory. Only those who do not want to admit that God controls all things are unable to see that fact.

The doctrine of Divine Providence is based in the fact that God is **intimately involved in all of His creation**, and **nothing happens** nor acts in and of itself. Divine providence is the **means** God s uses to see that all things **accomplish His purpose** in history, and it is the care He shows for all His creatures. God s providential hand can at times **be seen** in events, but far more often, He works out of sight. His providence covers the smallest detail — not even a sparrow escapes His knowledge.

**Let me define** the Divine Providence of God.

Divine Providence is the work of God by which He preserves all of His creation; Divine Providence is active in all that takes place in all of creation; Divine Providence directs all things to the end God has ordained.

It seems that many Christians take what is called a **DEISTIC** view of the whole situation — at least they act and talk like it. **Deism** holds that God created the world, **established** its basic laws, **wound** it up like a **clock**, and set it in motion. Then He **withdrew** and now watches from the sidelines. If things get too far out of hand, then He will intervene. I would suppose this could be called the "clock theory," or the "**Absentee Landlord theory**." He **made** the clock, wound it up, and only intervenes if it gets too far off time. Then He resets the time, if you please. These people do not see Him as the **pilot of the vessel** which He made, **directing** its every move. Many of the founding fathers of the US were Deists.

There are **two areas** where God s providence works: All creation as a **whole** (called **general** providence), and then God s working in **individual** parts of His creation (called **special** providence) Some people add a third area, which is God s special care of His children.

Let me give you some **simple things** about God's control of all things.

First, God, the great Creator of all things, **upholds all things** by the word of His power:

**Hebrews 1:1** *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; 3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and **upholding all things by the word of his power**, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;*

In other words, **Christ works unseen** in the background to **keep everything working** together. Nothing works without His word.

Second, God, or Christ, directs, controls and governs all **creatures**, actions and things:

**Daniel 4:34** *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: 35 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?*

**Psalms 135:6** *Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.*

**Acts 17:25** *Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; 26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; 28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. (Job chapters 38-41.)*

Illustration:

There was a story in the December Reader's Digest, *The DEVIL on Carpenter Peak*. It was about a young man who went hiking in a Colorado state park. The trail he took was a winding 3.2 mile trek to the 7200 foot summit of Carpenter Peak. It was a beautiful day in April, 1998, with temperatures close to 80. He hiked to the top, and felt so good, he ran the last 1/4 mile to the peak. On the way down, he met a mountain lion, a cougar. He tried to bypass the lion, but the lion **attacked** him, and continued to attack him, chewing him up very badly. When it seemed to be the end of life for him, he makes this statement:

But I had nothing left. My fight was over. The cat had returned for more, and there was nothing I could do. I again glanced over my shoulder, expecting to see the demonic visage of my tormentor one final time. Instead, I was given a glimpse of heaven: where once the lion had stood, the tree canopy had thinned, and the empty trail had lightened. I never had a relationship with God before, but in that moment I felt the presence of him surrounding me. The cat was nowhere to be found.

The park rangers sought the cat, but could not find it. It took 70 staples just to close his head wounds.

Here a man who made no provision for the God of heaven knew that it was God's Divine Providence that stopped the cat before he killed him.

Third, nothing is too small or insignificant to avoid His providential care:

**Matthew 10:29** *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. 30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.*

God is in the most minute details.

Fourth, His providential care is most wise and at all times, holy:

**Proverbs 15:3** *The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.*

**Psalms 104:24** *O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches.*

**Psalms 145:17** *The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.*

Obviously, from our point of view, many times it seems that things are out of control, but by faith, we must say,

**1 Thessalonians 5:18** *In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*

Fifth, the Lord works according to His **infallible foreknowledge** this does not mean that because God knew what was going to happen, He worked things out toward that end. Rather, it means that HE PLANNED everything according to His good pleasure before the world began, and works everything toward that end:

**Acts 15:18** *Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.*

**Psalms 94:8** *Understand, ye brutish among the people: and ye fools, when will ye be wise? 9 He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see? 10 He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know? 11 The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity.*

Sixth, God works in all the events of this world and in all the events of our lives according to the free and unchangeable counsel (decisions) of His own will that is, God did not seek any one's advice on what to do nor how to do it:

**Psalms 33:10** *The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect. 11 The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.*

**Ephesians 1:11** *In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: 12, That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.*

Notice here that the Lord works **all things after the counsel of his own will** in our lives, so that we who have trusted in Christ would be **TO THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY**. Don't ask me how the events that have happened over this past year in **my life**, in **your life** and in the **life of this church** work for the praise of **His glory**, but according to God's word, they have and they will. We will be able to look back from the future and see how, but now we see through a glass darkly.

**1 Corinthians 13:12** *For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.*

Seventh, all events that take place in any part of creation are for the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness and mercy:

**Isaiah 63:14** *As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name.*

**Ephesians 3:10** *To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.*

**Romans 9:17** *For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.*

**Genesis 45:7** *And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.*

**Psalms 145:7** *They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness.*

Yes, this past year has been a year to remember, maybe in your life, and certainly in the life of our family. It has been a year of events that are beyond our understanding at this point in time.

But as a Christian, I must believe by faith that all things have worked and will work for the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness and mercy.

Added for those who want more:

The word of God clearly speak of at least 11 areas in which God's providence is in control:

1. **Ps. 103:19; Eph. 1:11**, over the universe at large.
2. **Ps. 104:14; Mt. 5:45**, the physical world.
3. **Ps. 104:21; Mt 6:26**, brute creation.
4. **Job 12:23; Acts 17:6**, the affairs of nations.
5. **Dan 4:25; Jn 19:11**, rulers of nations.
6. **Ps. 136:16; Gal 1:15, 16**, the individual's lot in life.
7. **Pro. 16:33; Mt. 10:30**, things seemingly accidental or insignificant.
8. **Ps. 4:8; Rom. 8:28**, protecting the righteous.
9. **Det. 8:3; Ph. 4:19**, in supplying the wants of God's people.
10. **Ps. 65:2; Mt. 7:7**, giving answers to prayer.
11. **Ps. 7:12, 13; 11:6**, in exposer and punishment of the wicked.

Some believe that nature is controlled by an iron-clad system of laws, thus ruling out any miracles or miraculous answers to prayer, or special intervention by God's providence. Still others, which would be more common, believe that God only controls the big things in our lives, while He pays no attention to the small. But, of course, just like in our own lives, if He doesn't care for the small, He doesn't for the large. (Not one hair falls outside of His divine providence.)

Divine Providence can be divided into 3 parts. 1. Divine Preservation. 2. Divine Concurrence, and 3. Divine Government.

First, Divine Preservation. By this we mean the continuous work of God whereby He upholds all things.

This does not mean that God continues to create the world from moment to moment or that He withdraws His hand from the world and does not destroy it. Rather, Divine Preservation says that although the world exist separate from God (not part of God as the pantheists hold), yet it continues to exist dependant upon God in every way, and not in itself in any way.

All of Creation is dependant upon His divine power for its continues existence. He alone is the first cause, he is the uncaused cause, God alone is Sovereign and absolutely independent. All things are dependant upon Him, **Ps 63:8; Neh 9:6; Acts 17:28; Col 1:17; He 1:3.**

**Second**, Divine Concurrence, defined as that work of God whereby He co-operates with all His creation and causes them to act precisely as they do.

This means that there are real forces at work in this world; forces of nature, forces of the will of man, **BUT** that these forces do not work independently of God. God is at work in every act of His creation, not only in their good acts, but also in their evil. He moves them to action, accompanies their every action at every moment, and makes their action accomplish His divine plan. He is always the primary cause, without which man can do nothing. The same deed in its entirety is both a deed of God and a deed of His creature. And though we cannot

fully understand it, man is the one who is held morally responsible for the deed. God's Concurrent action involves no responsibility for evil on His part.

- A. God works in the entire creation and in all His creation, **Ps. 104:20, 21, 30; Amos 3:6; Dt. 8:18; Mt. 5:45; 10:29; Acts 14:17.**
- B. Sinful acts are under His divine control, **Gen 25:5; Ex. 14:17; Isa. 66:4; Rom. 2:4; 9:22; 2 Thes 2:11.**
- C. God restrains the sinful works of the sinner, **Gen 6:3; Job 1:12; 2:6; Ps. 76:10; Isa 10:15; Acts 7:51.**
- D. He overrules evil for good, **Gen 50:20; Ps. 76:10; Acts 3:13.**

Then, **Third.** Divine Government. God's providence in this area is defined as His continued activity whereby He rules all things, so that they answer to His purpose of their existence.

Both O and NT teach that God is King of the universe and rules all things according to His divine good pleasure. Any teaching that God's Sovereignty is replaced by His Fatherhood in a new dispensation, is totally unscriptural, **Mt. 6:33; 1 Tim 1:17; 6:15; Rev. 19:6.**

God adopts His rule to the nature of the creature over which He rules. He governs the spiritual world differently from the physical world.

- A. His government is universal, **Ps. 103:14; Dan 4:34, 35; Ps. 22:28, 29.**
- B. His government is over the most significant things, **Mt 10:29-31**, and
- C. Over the most insignificant of things, **Pro. 16:33.**
- D. He governs the good deeds of Man (called, God's General Grace), **Ph. 2:13.**
- E. He governs the evil deeds of Man, **Acts 14:16.**
- F. He is King of Israel (ruler and controller of all affairs), **Isa 33:22.**
- G. He rules (controls) among the nations, **Ps. 47:9.**
- H. He establishes the boundaries of the nations, **Acts 17:26.**
- I. Nothing will ever withdraw from His government, **Ps. 139:8.**

Let's conclude this with a word about miracles. The so-called laws of nature represent God's usual method of working in nature. It is His good pleasure to work through these secondary causes; that is, through the powers of nature or the actions of men. This does not mean that He cannot depart from His established order in these areas by an act of His will and not violate these laws. In fact, when we throw a ball we violate the law of gravity without disturbing it. If we can do this, how much more possible is it for the omnipotent God to do this?