

# Teaching Sound Doctrine

## Divine Providence

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. 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 afflicts the hearts of so many children of God. If people could only understand this Bible doctrine and have the conviction that the Lord is at hand (near, *Phil. 4:5 Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.*) and that he really cares for us (*1 Pet. 5:7 Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.*), it would do away with so much insecurity, fear, depression and despair that exists in the hearts of so many today.

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 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 (Jn. 6:8-14). Miracles were for the purpose of confirming the word (Mk. 16:17-20 *And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.*) The word was given in its completeness and confirmed, then miracles ceased (*1 Cor. 13:8-13 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. 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. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the*

*greatest of these is charity.)*

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 the necessity of following the word of God in every detail. God, through his word, brings about conversion and edification of his people (Rom. 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. ; Acts 20:32 And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.). 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 -willing wills and opposing wills.

Good men suffer many times at the hands of evil men - evil men meaning it for evil 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 brother: "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Gen. 50:20). The psalmist said: "He (God) sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant" (Psa. 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 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, but through his providence - working through his established laws and ordinary channels. We pray for doors to be opened through which we can enter to preach the gospel (Col. 4:3 Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds;; 1 Cor. 16:9 For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and *there are* many adversaries.; 2 Cor. 2:12 Furthermore, when I came to Troas to *preach* Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord,), and God opens these doors

through his providence in answer to our prayers. We pray for our daily food (Matt. 6:11); we labor with our hands (Eph. 4:28), and God will provide our needs through his providence. We pray for the sick (Jas. 5:14-18), and God heals the sick - providentially. We pray that we may not be led into temptation and for God to deliver us from temptation (Matt. 6:13; 1 Cor. 10:13; Matt. 26:41); and God, through his providence, will make a way of escape in answer to our prayer (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 (Phil. 4:5,6; Jer. 23:23-24) and that we in everything can make our requests known to him and he will providentially answer our prayers (1 Jn. 5:14-15).

Jesus gives proof of divine providence to the Christian in Matthew 6:24-34. 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; 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 (Eph. 4:28 Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with *his* hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.), then leave the rest to God. In verse 26 Jesus tells us to "behold the fowls of the air", - God feeds them, and we are of much more value than fowls, so God will feed and take care of us. In verse 27 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 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" (v. 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 (Rom. 4:21). Do you believe that God works through his providence today? Too many Christians have "little faith" (Matt. 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" (1 Pet. 3:12); that he is near us (Phil. 4:5), and that we can cast our cares upon him for he does care for us (1 Pet. 5:7)