

# The Providence of God

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**Romans 8:28 (NKJV) “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”**

America just ended another election cycle. As usual, some are elated with the outcome while others wonder if it is the end of America. It has been said that the impact of Hurricane Sandy was a decisive factor in the outcome of the election. If this is true, who planned the hurricane? Was it the Democrats? Was it the Republicans? Obviously the answer is “neither.” Was this hurricane a simple occurrence of nature or does God control the weather? If He does, then the question begs to be asked, “What is God doing?”

Life is filled with paradoxes. Our existence has its ups and downs, joys and sorrows, triumphs and tragedies, good and evil, prosperity and suffering, victory and defeat, health and sickness, and life and death. Unfortunately, the way and timing in which these things come to pass don't always make sense. We are often left scratching our heads asking, “Why?” The silence on the other side of that question can be quite deafening!

Romans 8:28 tells us that no matter how contradictory things may seem at the moment, “*all things work together for good* to those who love God and are the called according to His purpose.” Whether we like it or not or whether we understand it or not, we are expected to believe that God allows these seemingly contradictory realities to exist side by side for a purpose unknown to us now but which will one day be revealed. We are assured that God is working “all things” for our ultimate good and for His ultimate glory. God's work in the details of life is referred to as *providence*.

We don't hear much about “providence” these days. What is “providence?” Before answering that question, it is important to state what providence is *not*. First providence is not “deism.” Deism is the belief that God created the world and left it on its own (like winding a watch and leaving it to work on its own). Secondly, providence is not *pantheism*. Pantheism is the belief that the world does not have a real and distinct existence within itself, but is only a part of God. Thirdly, providence is not *chance*. Chance is the belief that whatever happens is based upon randomness apart from any purpose or design. Fourthly, providence is not “fate.” Fate is the belief in impersonal predetermination—i.e. that every event or action is simply the unavoidable result of a preceding action—much like cascading dominoes. Fifthly, providence is not *fatalism*. Fatalism is the belief that all things are predetermined, especially by the stars, thus removing human freedom and responsibility.

Providence, on the other hand, is the truth that God is actively related to and involved in creation at each moment, but that creation is distinct from Him. It teaches that events do not take place by random chance or by predetermined fate but rather by the active involvement of a personal yet infinitely powerful Creator and Lord. Thomas Watson, an early Puritan minister, wrote: There is no such thing as blind fate, but there is a Providence that guides and governs the world. “The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord (Proverbs 16:33)...Providence is God's ordering all issues and events of things, after the counsel of His will, to His own glory ... The wheels of the clock seem to move contrary one to the other, but they help forward the motion of the clock, and make the alarum [sic] strike; so the providences of God seem to be cross wheels; but for all that they shall carry on

the good of the elect.”<sup>1</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones explained: “Now perhaps the best way of describing what we mean by providence is to define it in terms of its relationship to creation. We can put it like this: creation, as we saw, means calling into existence something which did not exist before. So if that is creation, then providence means the continuation, or the causing to continue, of that which has been called into existence. Creation brings things into existence; providence keeps them, or guarantees their continuation in existence, in fulfillment of God’s purposes.”<sup>2</sup>

Although the word “providence” does not appear in Scripture, its reality is found throughout its pages. Consider just a few examples: the deliverance of Israel from Egypt and God’s providential care in the wilderness, David’s victory over Goliath, Daniel’s preservation in the lion’s den and subsequent promotion to power, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego’s deliverance from the fiery furnace, Jonah being swallowed by a great fish, the events surrounding the coming of Christ, and Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus. The Biblical testimony is clear. God is personally and actively involved in every detail of human existence. That brings great comfort when we realize that although things may be out of our control, they are not out of His control. Thugs, politicians, Muslims, communists, atheists, drug lords, world bankers, or one world activists are *not* in control of our world. Neither are kings or presidents. Psalm 75:6-7 (NKJV) declares, “*For exaltation comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south. But God is the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another.*” Proverbs 21:1 (NKJV) says, “*The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.*” Those who think they can resist God’s purpose will find themselves on the wrong side of His wrath (Psalm 2). God personally upholds all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3).

Providence is the outworking of God’s sovereignty. Sovereignty refers to autonomous power and control. This is usually manifested in kings. There is no one more sovereign in authority, power, or control than the LORD God of the Bible. Psalm 103:19 (NASB95) declares, “*The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all.*”

The basis upon which providence operates is God’s eternal decrees. Kings make decrees to establish their sovereign purpose and to insure that it will be realized. God said, “I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You.’” (Psalm 2:7 NKJV) Psalm 148:6 (NKJV) says, “*He also established them forever and ever; He made a decree which shall not pass away.*”

We can see the providence of God in the pages of human history. We can see it in the founding of our nation and in the re-establishment of the Jewish nation. God is actively at work all around us. Christians are not fatalists. We are to be actively engaged in following and obeying the revealed will of God. We are not to fret about what we cannot see and what we cannot control. We are to rest in the confidence of knowing that God sees the bigger picture and is actively working all things together for our good and for His glory. In this way we find comfort and rest in the lap of His divine providence.

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<sup>1</sup> Morgan, R. J. (2000). *Nelson’s complete book of stories, illustrations, and quotes* (electronic ed.) (650). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

<sup>2</sup> Lloyd-Jones, D. M. (1996). *God the Father, God the Son* (140). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.