**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**DIVINE PROVIDENCE**

**“All Things Come From His Hand”**

**October 27, 2024**

Many years ago, I read about a college student who was in trouble. She had two problems that are common to many students: poor grades and no money. She knew she had to tell her parents, but she also knew they wouldn’t be thrilled with the news. After giving it a lot of thought, she came up with a very creative way to soften the blows of reality. She wrote them a letter:

Dear Mom and Dad,

Just thought I’d drop you a note to clue you in on my plans. I’ve fallen

in love with a guy named Jim. He quit high school after grade eleven to get

married. About a year ago he got a divorce.

We’ve been going steady for two months and plan to get married in the

fall. Until then, I’ve decided to move into his apartment (I think I might be

pregnant.)

At any rate, I dropped out of school last week, although I’d like to finish

college sometime in the future.

On the next page she continued:

Mom and Dad, I want you to know that everything I’ve written so far in this

letter is false. NONE of it is true.

But Mom and Dad, it IS true that I got a C in French and flunked Math. It

IS true that I’m going to need some more money for my tuition payments.[[1]](#endnote-1)

How amazing is that! Even bad news can sound like good news if it is viewed from the right vantage point. It’s all a matter of perspective. The secret, of course, is having the *right* perspective. So much in life depends on where we are coming from, especially when we face the challenging and devastating circumstances of life.

That’s why the doctrine of providence is foundational to our faith. When we get terrible news, or when bad things happen, far too many of us envision God as a passive spectator. He is on His throne in heaven waiting to respond to our 911 call. But when we view our world through the Biblical lens of providence, a profoundly different God comes into focus. He is no passive spectator; He’s an active participant. He is the Creator of heaven and earth, and He powerfully preserves and governs all His creatures and their actions for His glory and the good of His people. God’s providence, therefore, is nothing more than the outworking of God’s sovereignty in each of our lives.

What does this mean for us today? J. I. Packer has said it best when he writes, “The doctrine of providence teaches Christians that they are never in the grip of blind forces (fortune, chance, luck, fate); all that happens to them is divinely planned, and each event comes as a new summons to trust, obey, and rejoice, knowing that all is for one’s spiritual and eternal good” (Rom. 8:28).2

The verse that Packer references in support of that statement is perhaps the most powerful and precious promise in the Bible: “*And we know that God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose*” (Rom. 8:28, NIV). Ephesians 1:11 reinforces the certainty of that promise; “*In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will*” (ESV).

This doctrine, when rightly understood, has been likened to a soft pillow upon which we can rest our weary heads. It brings us comfort in times of sorrow and bereavement. It’s been likened to a steel girder that upholds and sustains us through the most difficult times in our lives. It’s designed to function like a huge boulder on which we can place the full weight of our confident trust in God.

One of the very best explanations of divine providence is found in the Heidelberg Catechism (1563). It’s set within a context in which the catechism is explaining the essential truths of the Christian faith, as found in the Apostles Creed (Lord’s Day 7- Lord’s Day 24). On Lord’s Day 10, the Heidelberg’s teaching on providence is astounding: “All things come to us not by chance but from His fatherly hand.” But it’s important to note that Lord’s Day 10 is explaining what the Apostle’s Creed means when it says, “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.” (Lord’s Day 9)

Both Lord’s Days, therefore, must be viewed together. For as we shall see, God has not abandoned the world He created. Instead, He oversees everything that takes place in it. He involves Himself in *all* events and directs *all* things to their appointed end. In the words of Packer, “His hand may be hidden, but His rule is absolute.”3

**The Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 9**

**26 Q** What do you believe when you say, ‘I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth?”

**A.** That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who out of nothing created heaven and earth and everything in them**1**, who still upholds them and rules them by His eternal counsel and providence**2**, is my God and Father because of Christ His Son**3**. I trust Him so much that I do not doubt He will provide whatever I need for body and soul**4**, and He will turn to my good whatever adversity he sends me in this sad world**5**. He is able to do this because He is almighty God**6**; He desires to do this because He is a faithful Father**7**.

**1.** Gen. 1 and 2; Ex. 20:11; Ps. 33:6; Isa. 44:24; Acts 4:24; Acts 14:15; **2.** Ps. 104; Mt. 6:30; Mt. 10:29; Eph. 1:11; **3.** John 1:12-13; Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:4-7; Eph. 1:5; **4.** Ps. 55:22; Mt. 6:25-26; Luke 12:22-31; **5.** Rom. 8:28; **6.** Gen. 18:14; Rom. 8:31-39; **7.** Mt. 7:9-11.

The first thing to note is that this answer is loaded with important theological truths: (1) our heavenly Father is the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; (2) He created the world and everything in it out of nothing; (3) He still upholds and governs His creation by His counsel (wisdom) and providence; (4) this Creator and sustainer of the universe is *my* God and Father; (5) God is my Father because of Christ, His Son – only those who believe in His Son are given the right to become children of God. [[2]](#endnote-2)4

Second, and just as important, all of this theology leads us to trust Him. It’s because God created everything out of nothing, and because He still upholds and governs His creation, and because He is my Father in heaven, that I can count on Him: (1) I do not doubt His provision for me – body and soul; (2) I know He will turn to my good whatever adversity He sends me. In fact, if Almighty God is almighty, and my heavenly Father is fatherly, then I can trust that He is both able *and* willing to do whatever is good for me in this sad world.5

**The Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 10**

**27Q** What do you understand by the providence of God?

**A.** Providence is the almighty and ever present power of God**1** by which He upholds, as with His hand, heaven and earth and all creatures**2**, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty**3**– all things, in fact, come to us not by chance**4** but from His fatherly hand**5**.

**1.** Jer. 23:23-24; Acts 17:24-28; **2.** Hab. 1:3; **3.** Jer. 5:24; **4.** Prov. 16:33; **5.** Mat. 10:29.

Here’s the point: If God is the creator of all things and is truly almighty, then He will continue to sustain and govern everything He has created. And if God is our Father in heaven, then He will exercise His sovereign power and love for the ultimate good of His children. Therefore, we can be confident that all things come to us not by chance but from His fatherly hand.

This means there are no coincidences in life. There are no accidents. Every blessing, and every trial and tribulation is part of His purpose and plan for our lives. There is no pain or persecution, no financial disaster or chronic disease, no personal tragedy or emotional distress, nor any other kind of hardship that ever falls outside of His will and purpose for His people. If that’s true (and it is), then the last question is perhaps the most important of all to consider.

**28 Q** How does the knowledge of God’s creation and providence help us?

**A.**  We can be patient when things go against us**1**, thankful when things go well**2**, and for the future we can have good confidence that nothing can separate us from His love**3**. All creatures are so completely in His hand that without His will they can neither move nor be moved**4**.

**1.** Job 1:21-23; James 1:3; **2.** Deut. 8:10; 1 Thess. 5:18; **3.** Ps. 55:22; Rom. 5:3-5; Rom. 8:38-39; **4.** Job 1:12; Job 2:6; Prov. 21:1; Acts 17:24-28.

If our times are in His hands, then three conclusions necessarily follow. ***First*,** we can be *patient* when things go against us. The suffering of Job, and the imprisonment of Joseph, and the bereavement of Naomi all seemed pointless at the time. But looking back, their stories now make sense. So perhaps our great God and heavenly Father knows what He is doing with the pain He sends our way! If so, then we can look to Him with confident trust, patiently waiting for His purposes to be revealed for our lives.

***Second***, we can be *thankful* when things go well. If we truly believe in providence, then we will see that our blessings come from the hand of a good and gracious God as well. How many times have we prayed for a good doctor’s report, or for a good job interview, or for healing from a difficult surgery, or for wisdom and guidance and peace, or for traveling mercies – and then never think about thanking God once He sends the blessing our way. Christians who believe in providence ought to be the most thankful Christians on the planet!

***Third***, we can have confidence for the future. Nothing can ever separate us from His steadfast, loyal love! In light of God’s providence, we can know with certainty that He will always guide us and direct our path to our heavenly home. Yes, God does move in mysterious ways, ways which we do not always understand. But as we face the future, we can be confident that nothing moves – or can be moved – except by the hand of our great God and Father in heaven!

There are two illustrations that I’ve used in the past that are especially relevant for us today. First, the many events in our lives, both good and bad, are like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. No matter how hard we try, we can’t seem to make all the pieces fit into the beautiful picture that’s on the box top. The good news is that God has the box top; *and* He knows where every piece fits; *and* in time He will make sure that it is put there!

The second illustration comes from the medieval tapestries that are hung in The Cloisters in upper Manhattan. Oftentimes our life seems like the backside of those tapestries. It looks like a confusing mass of loosely connected knots and threads. We can only see the muted colors; there’s very little beauty, if any at all. But in God’s providence, He is weaving every seemingly random thread into a beautiful design. He sees things from the other side, and in time, we will too! In His providence, He is unceasingly, constantly causing all things, even the really bad things, to “*work together*” for our good and His glory. That’s why we can be patient and thankful today and be filled with confident hope for tomorrow. It’s all a matter of perspective!

“O Father, you are sovereign in all the worlds you made;

Your mighty word was spoken and light and life obeyed.

Your voice commands the seasons and bounds the ocean’s shore,

Sets stars within their courses and stills the tempest’s roar.

O Father, you are sovereign in all affairs of man;

No powers of death or darkness can thwart your perfect plan.

All chance and change transcending, supreme in time and space,

You hold your trusting children secure in your embrace.

O Father, you are sovereign, the Lord of human pain,

Transmuting earthly sorrows to gold of heavenly gain.

All evil overruling, as none but Conqueror could,

Your love pursues its purpose – our souls’ eternal good.

O Father, you are sovereign! We see you dimly now,

But soon before your triumph earth’s every knee will bow.

With this glad hope before us our faith springs up anew;

Our sovereign Lord and Savior, we trust and worship you!

(Margaret Clarkson, 1982)

1. Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life, Multnomah Press, 1983. P. 71.

   **2** Concise Theology, J. I. Packer, Tyndall House Publishers, 1993. P. 56.

   **3** Ibid.

   **4** Adapted from The Good News We Almost Forgot, Kevin DeYoung, Moody Press, 2010.

   **5** Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)