

# Providence<sup>1</sup>

“God’s works of providence are, His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures, and all their actions” (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q. 11). If creation was a unique exercise of divine energy causing the world to be, providence is a continued exercise of the same energy. By it the Creator, according to His own will, keeps all creatures in being, involves Himself in all events, and directs all things to their appointed end. God is completely in charge of His world. His hand may be hidden, but His perfect rule extends to all things.

It is sometimes supposed that God knows the future but does not control it; that He upholds the world, but does not intervene in it; or that He gives general direction, but is not concerned with details. The Bible emphatically rules out all such limitations of His providence.

The Bible clearly teaches God’s providential control (1) over the universe at large, Ps. 103:19; Dan. 4:35; Eph. 1:11; (2) over the physical world, Job 37; Ps. 104:14; 135:6; Mt. 5:45; (3) over the brute creation, Ps. 104:21, 28; Mt. 6:26; 10:29; (4) over the affairs of nations, Job 12:23; Ps. 22:28; 66:7; Acts 17:26; (5) over man’s birth and lot in life, 1 Sam. 16:1; Ps. 139:16; Is. 45:5; Gal. 1:15, 16; (6) over the outward successes and failures of men’s lives, Ps. 75:6, 7; Lk. 1:52; (7) over things seemingly accidental or insignificant, Pr. 16:33; Mt. 10:30; (8) in the protection of the righteous, Ps. 4:8; 5:12; 63:8; 121:3; Rom. 8:28; (9) in supplying the wants of God’s people, Gn. 22:8, 14; Dt. 8:3; Phil. 4:19; (10) in giving answers to prayer, 1 Sam. 1:19; Is. 20:5, 6; 2 Chr. 33:13; Ps. 65:2; Mt. 7:7; Lk. 18:7, 8; and (11) in the exposure and punishment of the wicked, Ps. 7:12, 13; 11:6. (L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* 2d rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1941], p. 168.).

Describing God’s involvement in the world and in the acts of rational creatures requires complementary statements. For example, a person wills an action, an event is triggered by natural causes, or Satan shows his hand—yet God overrules. Again, people may go against God’s will of command—yet they fulfill His will of events. People’s motives may be evil—yet God uses their actions for good (Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23). Although human sin is under God’s decree, God is not the author of sin (James 1:13–17).

God’s “concurrent” or “confluent” involvement in all that occurs does not violate the natural order, ongoing causal processes, or the free, responsible agency of human beings. God’s sovereign control does not take away the responsibility and power of second causes; on the contrary, they are created and have their roles by His appointment.

Of the evils that infect God’s world (spiritual, moral, and physical) the Bible says: God permits evil (Acts 14:16); He uses evil as a punishment (Ps. 81:11–12; Rom. 1:26–32); He brings good out of evil (Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23; 4:27–28; 13:27; 1 Cor. 2:7–8); He uses evil to test and discipline those He loves (Matt. 4:1–11; Heb. 12:4–14); but one day He will redeem His people from the power and presence of evil altogether (Rev. 21:27; 22:14–15).

The doctrine of providence teaches Christians that they are never in the grip of blind fortune, chance, luck, or 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).

---

<sup>1</sup>Whitlock, Luder G. ; Sproul, R. C. ; Waltke, Bruce K. ; Silva, Moiss.: *Reformation Study Bible, the : Bringing the Light of the Reformation to Scripture : New King James Version*. Nashville : T. Nelson, 1995