

# The Sovereign Providence Of God

*“See now that I, I am He, and Me; it is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal, and there is no one who can deliver from My hand.”*

Deuteronomy 32:39

# The Sovereign Providence of God

*“The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.”*

Job 1:21

The Lord's providence is His preordained plan made before the creation of the world for the whole creation to return to His glory. In His wisdom He has allowed every trial and tribulations we face in life to work for the growth of our faith, as we learn to trust in Him who is always with us who are in Christ; as He works all things together for our good, because we love Him, and have been called by Him according to His purpose, so that we should be transformed into the image of Christ for His glory.

Providence indicates the Divine action with His presence.

And because the fallen world is full of discord in the corruption of nature, and sinful people who are in rebellion and against God, there are many daily opportunities for our spiritual growth as we go on obeying God's written word by following the leading of the Holy Spirit, always trusting our heavenly Father to keep us even to the end of the world, because He possesses us through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, who is now Lord of all.

Providence is God's hand working in the world, in general and particular, for His glory and for our eternal enjoyment.

It would seem that the majority of people in the world would want God to make us comfortable. But whatever comes to us, comes with His allowance. We shrink back from Cancer as never being the will of God. We don't want to accept that all types of mental illness are under His governance. And what about Polio, Coronavirus, AIDS, Cerebral haemorrhage, Diabetes, Alzheimer's disease, Heart failure, Malaria, Ebola. The list goes on and on. But God is sovereign over all.

## **In the meantime:**

Nature is under the curse of God's judgement because of sin, generally, so from time to time it is destabilised and disruptive according to its corrupted nature. However, there are particular times when God intervenes, allowing satan to work havoc, and other times like the

miracles performed by Christ, and when Christ quietened the storm, and at the death of Christ, where there was darkness for 3 hours at mid-day.

In mankind, God has handed sinful man over to the power of sin and the dominion of satan, generally. So, man is destabilised and disrupted according to the law of God's commandments because of his fallen nature, generally, as self-interest has precedence. However, from time-to-time God intervenes in particular lives by removing the limitations imposed by the Spirit, so that a man's heart is unleashed to do the bidding of the devil in accordance with God's preordained plan in that particular situation.

Therefore, nothing happens for nothing. Everything is ultimately from the hand of God, so we don't bite the hand that feeds us.

God's just and merciful hand is moving everything towards the consumption of all things according to His preordained will, in Christ, and for the glory of the Father. In most part, this working is beyond our understanding, even while it is for our benefit. If we thought we knew what would happen, we would often be petrified into inaction. But His providence ensures that those He has saved in Christ will experience the fullness of the kingdom of God when Christ returns to consummate His wedding of the believers to Himself.

From time-to-time God gets involved through providence in particular situations, both natural and human, so that actual events take place according to His preordained purposes for His glory and our future enjoyment. And while God is opposed for a short time by Satan and his spiritual forces in the heavenly places, they don't have the last say. Because, at all times, the whole creation, the good and the bad, is upheld and maintained by God's personal superintendence and divine Majesty to uphold His holiness and glory.

Consequently, it is wise to see all destabilising and disruptive events, both natural and human, as a cause for us to repent from our rebellious independence which dishonours God, and to turn and bow down in submission and obedience to Him; so that we live moment by moment according to His commandments as recorded for our instruction in the Bible.

As we move closer to the consumption of all things in Christ, the limiting of the destabilising and disruptive events in creation will be withdrawn by God the Spirit, both in nature and man, as He removes His restraint, the stage is prepared for the final battle between God and satan.

At that time the final judgement of God will be announced on all sinful flesh, and redemption will be completed for all those in Christ Jesus in majestic glory. And all the forces of darkness, the devil, along with his evil spiritual forces, and all who have given their allegiance to him by ignoring God, will be assigned to eternal damnation.

For now: *"the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and in a godly manner in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Christ Jesus."* Titus 2:11-13

The "all" are the ones who *"deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and in a godly manner in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Christ Jesus."*

God's providence then is a cause for rejoicing for the redeemed people of God, because God will have His way in all creation even as the devil rages. *"Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or trouble, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? Just as it is written: "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE KILLED ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE REGARDED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* Rom 8:35-39

### **Today, God's providence is working for us who believe in Christ**

Providence is working to producing Devoted, Effective, Enlightened, Passionate rivers of living water flowing from the heart of people who are born to share the deep, deep love of God with the world.

There are many apparent contradictions in the scriptures, but only apparent, God is not confused, but we consider our reasoning to be equal with His wisdom. If we want easy answers for the awkward truths in the Bible, and we don't want to do the hard work of thinking, we will lack discernment. We will be prone to accept anything given with conviction from nice people like us who also don't think deeply enough.

One awkward truth is that God allows evil. Everyone does what is evil in the sight of God, if God didn't allow our evil, we would all be dead. On the one hand He requires holiness from all, and on the other hand, He allows evil people to carry out their sinful desires.

The simple truth is complex, God commands obedience to His word, but He allows sin and disobedience in defiance of His word. The truth is, He is patient and merciful in His wisdom, and slow to anger, otherwise we would all learn nothing, because we wouldn't exist anymore. God perseveres with sinners because He would save some for Himself to be transformed into the image of Christ.

Therefore, misrepresenting the truth of the Bible because of poor thinking and personal prejudice will result in taking God's word out of context and thereby changing the meaning God intended. And this is the same as contradicting God, which is itself sinful. And then, if we are proposing to teach the same thing to others, this can be seen as arrogance, and may well result in evil being considered good.

### **God's providence works with tribulation throughout history**

Deuteronomy 28 the world is curse and under judgment

*“But it shall come about, if you do not obey the Lord your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.”*

Deut 28:15

They will be cursed with all the diseases of Egypt, also every sickness and every plague. The LORD will delight over you to make you perish and destroy you. They will be torn from the land. The LORD will scatter them among all peoples. They shall serve other gods, wood and stone. They shall find no rest. The LORD will give them a trembling heart, failing of eyes, and despair of soul. Their life shall hang in doubt.

They will dread night and day and have no assurance of your life. They will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but there will be no buyer.”

Deut 28:16- 68

*“So all these curses shall come on you and pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you would not obey the LORD your God by keeping His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you.”*

Deut 28:45

In the book of Revelation God is in charge and that world events, even those that are most terrifying are controlled by Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of history. John states this boldly when he describes how the Lamb who is before the throne takes the scroll from the hands of God the Father and begins to break its seals. The breaking of the seals in Revelation chapter 6 to 8 continues the vision of heaven that is described earlier in chapters 4 and 5.

On earth we see the calamities of world history being released by the One who alone is worthy to break the scroll's seals. As Jesus breaks the seals, the events that they portend unfold, as symbolised in the case of the first four seals by four variously coloured horses and their riders, who go out from God's presence in order to bring suffering to the earth. They are the famous "four horsemen of the apocalypse."

“In Revelation 6, the world is not at peace, it is at war. And what is most important, God is not sending His messengers into the world to discover whether the world is at peace or at war but in order to bring war and its terrible aftermath to those who have not heeded His call to repentance and who must now experience His just judgments. It is Jesus who is in charge and who breaks the seals and thus brings judgment. In case we miss the significance of this, even the call that summons the four riders to "Come!" is spoken by the four living creatures who surround the throne of the Almighty and who speak for God.”

"Come!" means "Be going!" or "Come out and get going!" From James Montgomery Boice. Seven churches Four horsemen One Lord.

The battle continues with the Lion looking like a Lamb reigning over all the earth.

*'I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.'*  
Rev 6:2

*'And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.'*  
Rev 6:4

*'When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, "Come." I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard something like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine.'*  
Rev 6:5-6

*'When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come." I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.'*  
Rev 6:7-8

### **And judgment continues**

*'I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'"*  
Rev 6:12-17

In the time of the Church age, the Lord will pour out seven bowls of wrath on the earth, as disastrous plagues. They are recorded as apocalyptic events that were seen in the vision of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Seven angels are given seven bowls of God's wrath, each consisting of judgements full of the wrath of God. These seven bowls of God's wrath are poured out on the wicked and the followers of the Antichrist after the sounding of the seven trumpets.

The curse continues in the world today because the world has not repented. *‘Then I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, “Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.” So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image. The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died. Then the third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters; and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters saying, “Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things; for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it.” And I heard the altar saying, “Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments,” The fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to it to scorch men with fire. Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory. Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain, and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds. The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, so that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east.’*

Rev 16:1-12

### **God's providence includes death**

It's easy for us to identify the good as the blessings in the natural world that provide for our enjoyment.

But we avoid attributing evil to God. While He uses secondary means in the sinful actions of men, and the destruction caused by natural disasters, He still reigns over all.

*"I kill and I make alive,"*

Deut. 32:39

Under the providence of God, the world with all inhabitants was destroyed by flood, men, women and children were put to death.

*'So all creatures that moved on the earth perished: birds, livestock, animals, and every swarming thing that swarms upon the earth, and all mankind; of all that was on the dry land, all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, died.'*

Gen 7:21-22

*'Then it happened that night that the angel of the Lord went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when the rest got up early in the morning, behold, all of the 185,000 were dead.'*

2 Kings 19:35

*'God did not spare His own Son but handed Him over — to death.'*

Rom 8:32

*The Lord was pleased to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief; when He makes Himself an offering for sin,*

Isa 53:10

*"This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death."* (Acts 2:23) God had a plan to see His Son killed.

In the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D. God allowed over a million Jews to be put to death.

In the holocaust 6 million Jews were put to death. And how many from two world wars, the Vietnam war, Iraq, Afghanistan, and countless other mincing machines of the bodies of the innocent and the guilty.

God is no stranger to death and suffering; He gave His Son to die for sinful man.

### **The Church is not spared from suffering**

*"It is through many tribulations that we must enter the kingdom of God."*

Acts 14:22

According to His sovereign will and mercy, this fallen world is now being used by God as His training arena for His children to be putting off the remnants of our fleshly ways of our past life in the world so we learn to grow in righteousness according to putting on the Life of Christ who now lives in us by the eternal Spirit. Suffering in the world is God's timely medicine in the pursuit of holiness.

On this fallen earth, Jesus says we will suffer. (John 16:33) Growing up in Christ means not seeking to escape our trials, but trusting God will be with us and ultimately use them for our good.

In Romans 8:18-25 Paul says, *'For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the eagerly awaiting creation waits for the revealing of the sons and daughters of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, [a]in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. <sup>23</sup> And not only that, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons and daughters, the redemption of our body. <sup>24</sup> For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, through perseverance we wait eagerly for it.'*

God made the world good, but sin made the world bad. Then God in the wisdom of His judgment put mankind and creation under a curse. Now, for men, the curse means our relationship with the earth is no longer peaceful.

Verses 22-23, *"We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly...."* Creation is groaning, we're groaning, because the curse hurts. Under the providence of God every aspect of life can be a cause for groaning.

The Bible not only gives us example after example of suffering and evil in the world, but it explicitly tells us that suffering and trials WILL come our way: “*Count it all joy, my brothers, WHEN you meet trials of various kinds...*” (James 1:2) “*In this, you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.*” (1 Peter 1:6) “*...if they persecuted me, they WILL also persecute you.*” (John 15:20) The bible is very clear-- suffering will be something that we’ll experience, so it’s not a matter of *if* we’ll suffer but *when* we’ll suffer, and how much.

### **Providence means blessing through suffering**

And just like Jesus knew that His suffering had a purpose, we to are told by God that our suffering has a purpose.

Paul reminds us of our unseen blessing: “*Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, KNOWING that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*” Rom 5:4-5

*‘For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons and daughters of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons and daughters by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.’* Rom 8:14-17

Jesus suffered on the cross before He was raised in Glory. We are destined to suffer so that we may share in His glory.

Peter says: “*In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, SO THAT the tested genuineness of your faith more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*” 1 Pet 1:6-7

James was no stranger to suffering: “*He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.*”

Isa 53:3

Now it is our turn: *“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for YOU KNOW that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”* James 1:2-4

John Piper reminds us that we should not waste our suffering by grumbling or growing in anger or bitterness towards God. If we are not humbled in surrender to providence, we will miss out on bringing glory to God in our suffering. Instead, we should glorify God in our suffering by saying with Job *“Though He slay me, I will hope in Him...”* (Job 13:15) Our hope in God alone, and we can learn to rejoice in your sufferings, and we can look forward to the future glory that God has in store for us. *“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”* 2 Cor 4:16-17

*‘But we have this treasure in earthen containers, so that the extraordinary greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying around in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.’* 2 Cor 4:7-10

### **Understanding God’s providence means we embrace our Suffering**

*‘And not only this, but we also celebrate in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.’* Rom 5:3-5

*The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us; if we are faithless, He remains faithful—for He cannot deny Himself.* 2 Tim 2:11–13

*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let*

*steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.* James 1:2–4

While the consequences of the fall made way for a great evil to infect the world, it also made it possible for God to bring about even greater good for His chosen people. The greater good began to reign in the glory of the incarnation of Jesus, in the atonement for sins by the shedding of His blood, in the coming resurrection of all God's people because of the resurrection of Christ. Through the providence of God, life for the people of God is in Jesus Christ who has received dominion over all creation, and He has power over death that reigns in sin.

“What we find in the Bible is real and raw. The prising and proclaiming of God's pervasive providence was forged in flames of hatred and love, deceit and truth, murder and mercy, carnage and kindness, cursing and blessing, mystery and revelation, and, finally, crucifixion and resurrection.” John Piper

*'And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.'*  
Rom 8:28

### **All things!! Good and evil.**

In other words, the sovereignty of God is all encompassing and all pervasive. He holds absolute sway over this world. He governs wind (Luke 8:25), lightning (Job 36:32), snow, (Psalm 147:16) frogs, (Exod 8:1-15) gnats, (Exod 8:16-19) flies, (Exod 8:20-32) locusts, (Exod 10:1-20) quail, (Exod 16:6-8) worms, (Jonah 4:7) fish, (Jonah 2:10) sparrows, (Matt 10:29) grass, (Psalm 147:8) plants, (Jonah 4:6), famine (Psalm 105:16) the sun, (Josh 10:12-13) prison doors, (Acts 5:19) blindness, (Exod 4:11; Luke 18:42) deafness, (Exod 4:11; Mark 7:37) paralysis, (Luke 5:24-25), fever (Matt 8:15) every disease, (Matt 4:23) travel plans, (James 4:13-15) the hearts of kings, (Prov. 21:1; Dan 2:21) nations, (Psalm 33:10) murderers, (Acts 4:27-28) and spiritual deadness, (Eph 2:4-5) and all of them do his sovereign will. John Piper

The reason God exposes us to such losses is to rouse us to rely on Christ. Or to put it another way, the reason He makes calamity the

occasion for offering Christ to the world is that the supreme, all satisfying greatness of Christ shines more brightly when Christ sustains joy in suffering.

John Piper

God ensures His own counsel will always prevail. God declares the future and ensures it will happen; He makes it happen. He speaks His word, and then He adds, "*I am watching over My word to perform it*"  
Jer 1:12

“Since God owns all life, as its Creator and sustainer, (Psalm 24:1-2; Job 41:11; Acts 17:25) He may give it and take it at any time and in any way He pleases, as He acts in the fullness of His wisdom and goodness and justice. When God asserts, "I kill and I make alive," (Deut. 32:39) He is not merely declaring His power. He is declaring His right. He is declaring how He acts in His total uniqueness as God, as always in perfect righteousness. (Psalm 96:13; Isa 5:16; Jer 4:2; Acts 17:31; Rev. 19:11)

My sense is that there is a deep assumption in the hearts of most modern people that we have a right to life in relation to God. That is, He has no right to take our life. And, if He exists at all, He is obliged to do what He can to preserve our lives. Our life, most people feel, is ours. It does not belong to anyone else. And no one, not even God, has the right to take my life when I do not choose. I should be sovereign over my life. And if anyone takes my life, including God, He has done me wrong. That, I think, is the often unspoken form of our view of the "unalienable" right to life.

But that is not God's view. It is not the view of the Bible. To be sure, there is a human right to life in relation to other humans. No human has a right to take my life. But this right to life, which each of us has, is not a mere effect of genetic superiority to animals. It is owing to God's commandment and rooted in our relation to God as created in His image. God commanded, "You shall not murder." (Ex. 20:13) With that command, He endowed human beings with a right to life in relation to other people.

God's rule of every life is not bad news. It is glorious news, for in Christ Jesus nothing befalls us but what is good for us. (Rom.

8:28-32) Even in death we are "more than conquerors." (Rom. 8:35-39) As history draws to a close, and seasons of mounting death sweep the globe, (Rev. 6:4, 8) and God allows the saints to be conquered, (Rev. 13:7) and the great powers of earth become drunk with the blood of the saints, (Rev. 17:6) what will your confidence be? Not that God will spare your life. He has made no such promise. "We are being killed all the day long." (Rom. 8:36) No. Our confidence will be that God, in perfect wisdom and mercy and goodness, will appoint for us the death with which we will glorify God.

In Rev 9:18 God and His Angeles pour out horrible suffering and death on the world, which, no doubt, will take away the lives of both children and adults, since we see a vision in which "*a third of mankind was killed.*"

John Piper

Accepting and valuing God's providence helps us endure with confidence the painful situations in life that the Lord ordains for our greatest good.

### **Providence equips God's people for service**

*'For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.'*

Eph 2:10

Sanctification is a crucial part of salvation resulting in Christlikeness, and this means service to the Lord Jesus Christ.

*'But we should always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.'*

2 Thess 2:13

*'so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.'*

Rom 8:4

*'And although you were previously alienated and hostile in attitude, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His body of flesh through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.'*

Col 1:21-22

*'In all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works.'* Titus 2:7

*'Who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, eager for good deeds.'*  
Titus 2:14

*'How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?'*  
Heb 9:14

God's providence will not reach its purpose if people are not conformed to the life of Christ. If people are not being confirmed, God hasn't failed, the people are not in Christ.

What is clear from Hebrews 13:20-21, and from Paul's application the new covenant to the life of believers in 2 Corinthians 3, is that the transformation that God demands from His people is not just predestined concerning them, (Rom. 8:29) and promised to them, (Ezek 36:27) and purchased for them, (Titus 2:14) but is also performed in them. (Heb. 13:21) God's providence prevails from predestined obedience to accomplished obedience.  
John Piper

The reason God requires transformation in His people in conformity to Christ in holiness and love is to make their faith visible as the public display of the beauty and worth of Christ. Requiring visible obedience is part of God's overarching purpose in creation and redemption.

And so it is with the obedience of his people: "*Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*" (Matt. 5:16) Faith without visible fruit in holiness and love would be like a "*lamp under a basket.*" (Matt. 5:15) That is not what lamps are for. Nor what obedience is for.

Actually, faith without the fruit of love is not just invisible. It is nonexistent.

God commands and creates the visible fruit of faith not just to make it visible but also to confirm its reality. John Piper

God's work is effective because He has undertaken to make it happen. *"I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances."* Ezek 36:27

Therefore, faith without works is dead because it is showing no sign of life from God.

Jesus said: *"I am the vine, you are the branches; the one who remains in Me, and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."* John 15:5

No fruit no abiding. Those abiding in the vine display the life of the vine. No fruit, no life.

### **Providence has ears to hear from God**

The Lord God has written down His word, and from the time of Jeremiah until now, the people will not listen. Judgement is coming for the people will not repent.

*"They worship Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me."* Matt 15:8

The events happening in the world generally, and the personal suffering that assails us, should bring us to our knees in repentance, so we worship the Lord from the heart, because the Lord is the one who gives, and takes away. C. S. Lewis has said that the great disturbances we face in life is God's loudhailer.

We should never forget Deuteronomy 28 and the recapitulation written in Revelation 6 to 8 and Revelation 16:1-12 that remind us of the need for repentance.

### **Providence reveals our now and our not yet**

We pray to our Father *"Your kingdom come"* and there is a sense in which God's kingdom is already in force. *"At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to Him. But we see Him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death."* (Heb 2:8-9) Jesus' crowning shows us we have a "now" and a "not yet." Jesus is the King, but He says His kingdom is not yet of this world. *"My kingdom is not of this world."*

*If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.”*  
John 18:36

When we pray His kingdom, we must accept His Rule according to His will not our fantasy. His Rule is not our desire most of the time.

The atonement at this time doesn't include the physical body. Salvation begins with the heart of stone being replaced by a heart of flesh that is responsive to the touch of God.

For now, we groan along with the creation awaiting the fullness of our adoption with the return of Christ. Nowhere does our Father say we will have an easy trip home. Nowhere does God promise prosperity and comfort for the present, because finishing school has just begun.

Every distressing situation that can be experienced on earth is but a tool to be used by the teaching of the Spirit of God, which results in our highest spiritual gain.

So, we suffer now as we wait for the glory to come. Tribulations now, triumph later.

Our Father uses every opportunity the fallen world provides for our training in righteousness, so that we learn to trust Him in the fire of earthly trials, so that we may be refined like pure gold. And we know from experience that the fire hurts what is pertaining to the flesh it is burning away.

For this we can rejoice now, because we see the resulting glory to come.

Through many tribulations we enter the kingdom of God.

The cure for despondency and low spirits now, is to give praise and thanks to God for all things, because we love the Lord more than life on earth.

*'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God*

*through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials.'*  
Peter 1:3-6

We take our stand in the light God has provided with the providences of His indwelling Spirit, as we work our way through the providence of the darkness of the world.

When we see the hand of God's providence working on our behalf, we can give thanks in all things.

*'Trust in the Lord with all your heart; And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body; And refreshment to your bones.'*  
Proverbs 3:5-8

All who believe and obey are in Christ as the children of God, but we are not what we shall be. *"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."* (1 John 3:2) We are children of the King, but we must wait to see exactly what that means. *'And these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.'* (Rom 8:30) Our glory is not yet complete. *'For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.'*

2 Cor 4:17-18

In a spiritual sense we are already raised up with Him on His throne, (Eph 2:6) but we are still living down here. Down here we don't always behave in a glorified way, and our world doesn't look like anything heaven; but we have already received these things in Him; and one day they will be complete in Him. One day we will actually be seated with Him. *"He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."*

Rev3:21

However, accepting God's providence doesn't remove the pain and suffering, in fact, our suffering might even be more intense as we draw closer to Christ because we become more aware of the nature of sin. And it is Jesus who knows the seriousness of sin who shows us the way to glory is the cross of suffering.

Drawing us to Himself intensifies our understanding of sin and death in the face of the holiness of God. Then we will be more aware of the disaster of sin and our dishonouring the Father and the Son, by the witness of the Spirit to our hearts.

“To understand what God has committed to do for us in this pilgrim age, we must first understand what he commands from us. It will be helpful if we can lay down misleading preconceptions about how God's engagement to work for us relates to our efforts to obey his commands. I say this because we are going to see that at the very heart of how God brings us to glory is a paradox that many people find incomprehensible.

On the one hand, we are going to find that God commands his people to hold fast, (Heb 4:14) to endure, (Mark 13:13) to fight, (1 Tim. 6:12) to strive, (Luke 13:24) to press on, (Phil. 3:12) to not grow weary, (Gal. 6:9), to be faithful unto death (Rev 2:10) and to use every means of grace God provides to endure to the end and be saved. (2 Cor. 9:8) On the other hand, we are going to find that God is not standing aloof from this struggle, watching for its outcome. Rather, He is working in and through the struggle, (1 Cor. 15:10; Phil. 2:13; Col. 1:29) to see to it that we triumph over sin (Rom. 6:14) and Satan, (1 John 4:4; 5:18) and that nothing separates us from the love of Christ. (Rom. 8:35-37; see chapter 42) One of the greatest difficulties of the Christian life is to embrace with vigilance and joyful confidence both the seriousness of God's commands and the certainty of God's commitment to bring us home.”

John Piper

## **Providence is Reality**

For believers, understanding something of providence is a shield against despair. *‘And we know that God causes all things to work together for*

*good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.'*  
Rom 8:28

For others we know God will do what is right. *'Far be it from You to do such a thing, to kill the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?'*  
Gen 18:25

And now we see a situation where many want to live as if sin never entered the world. Unbelievers talk about their dead going to a better place. But believing church going people are astonished when they or their friends are afflicted with serious illness or catastrophe. They are sometimes dumbfounded, sometimes there can be feelings of being abandoned,

But more often than not, many are angry, even believers asking: *"God, what do you think you are doing."* After all, *being in the church should mean that God protects His people from these sorts of things. God's children are supposed to be happy and comfortable because their Father owns the cattle on a thousand hills. Come on now, this can't be right!!"*

How easy is it to forget that we are all sinners, that the consequences of sin are part of everyone's life. That death and disease belongs to everyone. That instead of killing off the entire world, God killed His only Son, and now uses sin for the greater good. To impart Justice and mercy wherever He chooses. To make diamonds out of coal. But always according to His righteousness and glory.

God has a plan to make a people for Himself who reflect His nature who will one day share in His glory and glorify Him.

His sovereign purpose being worked out is called providence. Three hundred years ago, providence was known widely amongst the Puritans. They lived each day knowing that *"the Lord gives and the Lord takes away."* But now, in our day, the Lord is supposed to just keep on giving.

The ultimate goal of providences is great mercy, even while in the present it comes through suffering. The Puritans knew providence as the hand of God, which caused them to be humble while rejoicing in the goodness of God; even when they were being persecuted unmercifully

for their faith, and often having to live with murderous disease and deprivation.

The Puritans knew the reality of the following scripture.

*'And if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.'*

Rom 8:17

Jesus didn't promise comfort for His disciples, He promised to keep them through tribulation and suffering. He promised His presence with us in our suffering as we determine to live for Him who died on our behalf. *'He died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose on their behalf.'* 2 Cor 5:15

Providence is His presence as He works out His plan through the good things and the evil, that squeeze the life out of people who have no faith.

To strengthen us as God works out His providence in the world, He gives us Himself so that His grace is sufficient for our needs. 2 Cor 12:9

Jesus says: "I will come to you"

John 14:3

*"The Helper is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him; but you know Him because He remains with you and will be in you."*

John 14:17

*"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."*

John 14:27

Therefore, with the promises of God we walk by faith and not by sight.

Walking by faith means as we face each challenge, each trial, we learn to respond according to the word of God. We learn to live as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. We learn humility and obedience as we live to honour Him in all things.

William Cowper (pronounced Cooper) 1731-1800, a renowned Poet and Hymnist, who knew a lot about chronic life-threatening suffering in depression, much more than most of us will ever know. And God's providence for him was beautiful hymns of praise and worship.

Quotes from hymns by William Cowper:

*'God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea, And rides upon the storm.'*

*'Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.'*

Oh Lord, thank you for your long-suffering patience and mercy.

*"He is the Rock, His works are perfect, and all His ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He."* Deut 32:4

We are ordained to be in God's Providence to be like Christ to the praise of His glory.

What the Father has begun, He will achieve, as we work out what by providence, He is working in us.

*'And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.'*

*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?'*

Rom 8:28-32

Embracing God's work of providence in His presence means we can give thanks in all things, *for this is the will of God.* 1 Thess 5:18

Praise the Lord.

## **Living Water Resources**

### **Come to the River**

*‘And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.*

*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?’*

**Rom 8:28-32**

**Contents compiled by**

**Robert C May**

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**[cometotheriver@optusnet.com.au](mailto:cometotheriver@optusnet.com.au)**

**[www.cometothestream.com](http://www.cometothestream.com)**