

The Providence of God

Our word "providence" conveys the idea of providing; the quality or state of being provident. The providence of God generally means the divine care, guidance and sustaining power of God over the universe and the affairs of men. I find it helpful to think of God's providence in terms of five realms where Scripture specifically has something to say: PERMISSION, PERFORMANCE, PREFERENCE, PROVIDENCE AND PROHIBITION.

There is that which God PERMITS. Paul said, ".I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits," (1 Cor. 16:7; Jas. 4:15). God "allowed all nations to walk in their own ways," and the Hebrew writer said, "and this we will do if God permits," (Acts 14:16; Heb. 6:3). This is clear. In the exercise of His wise providence, there are things God allows or permits.

Also, there is that which God PERFORMS; He makes certain things happen, performing certain actions. He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45). God gives to all life, and breath and all things (Acts 17:25). We can affirm, therefore, that God performs certain actions: He makes, He sends, He gives.

God PREFERS certain things. He desires or prefers that all men come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). Many are not interested in His truth, and He does not force them to obey it. But He certainly prefers that all men listen to and give favorable response to His truth. He desires that all men repent, and He prefers that there be no offenses among us (2 Pet. 3:9; Matt. 18:14).

There is that which God PROVIDES, in response to our petitions. If we believe what is written in passages like 1 Jno. 5:14,15, we know God responds to prayer. He says He does, and we can regard those provisions of God as part of His providential dealings (see also Jas. 1:5,17).

Then, there are things God PROHIBITS. Certain things are not allowed by God, and this affirmation assumes His activity in the affairs of men. "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will NOT ALLOW you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it," (1 Cor. 10:13). God, for instance, did not allow the devil to do certain things to Job. Likewise, God does not allow temptation to come into our lives which is beyond our ability to resist! (God not only prohibits irresistible temptation; he "makes" the way of escape.) These are things I firmly believe about the providence of God. He permits certain things; He performs certain acts; He prefers certain things, provides for us in reply to our prayers, and He prohibits certain things. I entertain no difficulty and no hesitation in regard to the fact of God's providence.

NOW, if you demand that I interpret the details of God's providence from day to day and event to event, I WILL NOT ACCEPT THAT CHALLENGE! A storm occurs and wipes out a whole community, killing several citizens, and the questions follow: Did God cause it, or just permit it? If God caused it directly, why? What did He have in mind? Was this just an indirect consequence of living in a world corrupted by sin? I cannot answer these questions. And, the fact that I function as a gospel preacher does not afford me any depth of insight into the mysteries of providence. The fact that I firmly believe in divine providence does not qualify me to interpret the details!

I know God answers prayer, even though I may not know exactly how He does it. I believe God has the ability to use various influences, circumstances and people for my good. There isn't any doubt in my mind; He has the ability to work among nations. He can use weather, illness and even wicked behavior for His own purposes. But when it comes to exactly and specifically what God causes, controls, permits or provides, I am not capable of knowing all about that. And, I don't need to know all about that. What I need to know is my God and my duty to Him; my Savior and how to respond to and honor Him.

Let us not be ashamed to proclaim the fact of God's providence. But let us be exceedingly careful what we impulsively affirm, claim or attribute to God. There is the very real danger of "words without knowledge" (Job 38:2; Eccl. 5:2).

- by Warren E. Berkley

How to Settle It

When people disagree about how many ounces or pounds something weights, they can settle the matter by using a scale – the standard of authority.

When people disagree about the length of a piece of lumber, they can resolve the disagreement by using a measuring tape – the standard of authority.

When people disagree about what is right and wrong in religious matters, they should settle the matter by using the Bible – the standard of authority.

- *selected*

Challenges for the New Year

The beginning of a new year provides an excellent opportunity for us to pause, ponder, plan, and prepare for the future. We hope that the New Year will especially cause us all to think about our spiritual service to God and how we can improve in the fulfillment of our duties to Him. Let us challenge you in these specific areas:

- Spend more time in prayer. Don't allow the day to begin or end without spending time in prayer to God. Throughout the day, stop and petition Him for help and strength. And, by all means, don't just wait for a crisis to develop before you think to pray. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

- Study your Bible more consistently. Use one of the available daily Bible reading schedules, or come up with your own plan to read on a regular basis. Don't just rush through a few verses. Instead, really study the text to learn its meaning. Before you end a reading session, think about how you can make application of what you've read in a real and practical way. "Give attendance to reading . . ." (1 Timothy 4:13).

- Attend every Bible study and worship in this New Year. This, of course, is your duty -- but it is also a privilege. BE HERE! Make this a high priority. Why would you not want to be present to worship God and study His Word? "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together . . ." (Hebrews 10:25).

- Teach the lost. We all have friends, neighbors, co-workers and family members who are lost in sin. They NEED us to share the gospel with them. Make a firm commitment to reach at least one of them with the "good news" this year. If each Christian would bring just one person to the Lord each year, we could soon convert the whole world. Let's do it! "Go ye therefore and teach all nations . . ." (Matthew 28:19).

- Live a pure, godly life. Nothing else matters if we are not living faithfully for the Lord. Think about this, and let it be manifested in how you talk, where you go, who you associate with, how you dress, etc. Others are looking to you, and evaluating Christianity on the basis of what they see of it in you. "Ye are the light of the world . . . let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16).

In a very real sense, having a "Happy New Year" depends on how well you fulfill your spiritual duties to God. Think!

- *by Greg Gwin*