

GOD IS: PROVIDENCE

Did you hear about the lady who lost her diamond ring 13 years ago, and found it this fall on their Alberta farm? Harvesting carrots, they discovered one growing right through her ring. Wonder how many carats!

Do you think that was all in the providence of God? The word providence comes from the Latin *pro-videre* meaning to see ahead. Providence was capitalized to refer to God about the time of the Puritans. The city by that name in Rhode Island was established by God's provision for religious refugees. Our founding fathers wrote the Declaration of Independence "*with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence.*" God provides. This week and next, let's look at four ways God works out His providence in the world - even in the midst of disasters and tragedies as well as blessings.

1- God's providence is not deism or determinism. Deism is a mechanistic idea that God created the world but is not intimately involved. A common Enlightenment philosophy, many people today live as though these things were true, perhaps subconsciously holding to "the consequences of your decisions are all that will happen; only physical laws of the universe run things; storms happen; deal with it" etc. In contrast, determinism is a fatalistic idea that everything is preplanned, "so human choices are not real. You are just a pawn in cosmic chess." Both views have huge philosophical and theological problems.

The Bible says something very different about God's providence. Romans 8:28-31 "*we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son*" and those He predestined He also called, justified, and glorified. "*What then shall we say to these things?*"

2- God's providence is "divine compatibilism." This is a phd term. Wayne Grudem explains, "God's providence is compatible with human voluntary choice. God works all things together so that the absolute divine sovereignty of God is compatible with human significance and real choices." Acts 2:23 says "*this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.*" Their choices and actions were voluntary, yet according to God's plan. No one was coerced to kill Jesus. Mankind is not a race of robots, but creatures made in God's image and who are responsible for their choices. And life is no cosmic chess game where God must wait to see what moves men make, then intervene. God is so big that He is always in control. Acts 2 goes on to say,

"*when they heard this they were cut to the heart and said, what shall we do?*" They knew they were responsible and accountable. Peter quotes the prophet Joel, "*everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved*" and then he says, repent and believe, and receive forgiveness of sins, for everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself. And those who received his word were about 3,000 souls. God worked it all out, and without God's sovereign will not a single person could ever be saved.

Those who deny compatibilism wrongly think it makes God the author of evil. They say "the providence of God is subordinate to creation and cannot hinder free will." But this makes man sovereign over God's will, which cannot be true. In Romans 9 not just any offspring of Abraham could lead to the promised Messiah. In verse 10, "*before they were born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose in election might stand, not because of works but because of His call*" God chose Isaac's son Jacob, not the elder Esau. Verse 16, "*so then, it depends not on human will or exertion but on God, who has mercy on whom He will have mercy.*" Verse 19 "*you will say then, why does He still find fault? For who can resist His will? But who are you, O man, to answer back to God. Has the potter no right over the clay?*" Scripture plainly teaches the sovereignty of God over all aspects of His creation. He is God.

Ephesians 1:11 "*God works all things according to the counsel of His will.*" Colossians 1:17 "*He is before all things and in Him all things hold together.*" Daniel 4:35 "*He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth and none can stay His hand or say what have you done.*" As we've seen throughout our series on God's attributes, if God is not in control, then He is not God. Is this a dilemma to resolve? Deep theological waters? Always go to Scripture. God is not subordinate to your intellect. In your attempts to understand God you must not make Him smaller, but ever greater.

Next time, we'll explore 3- how God provides everything you need to do His will; and 4- how God works out everything for His glory and our good. God is providence, and you can trust Him!