

# ***Providence - The Works and Decrees of God***

In Rhode Island, there is a major city named Providence. There is something extraordinary about its name. The name of the city calls attention to the wide gap in thinking that exists between former generations and our present society. Who would name a city “Providence” today? The word itself sounds old fashioned and archaic.

When I read the writings of Christians from earlier centuries I am struck by the multitude of references to God’s providence. It seems as though prior to the twentieth century, Christians were more keenly in tune with the providence of God in their lives than we are. The spirit of naturalism that views all events in nature to be ruled by independent natural forces has made its impact on our generation.

The root meaning of the word *providence* is “to see in advance or beforehand,” or “to provide for.” As such, the word fails to convey the deep meaning of the doctrine of providence. The doctrine signifies far more than that God is a spectator of human events. It contains far more than a mere reference to His foreknowledge.

The [Westminster](#) divines in the seventeenth century defined providence in this manner:

God, the great [Creator](#) of all things, doth uphold, direct, dispose and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.

What God creates, He also sustains. The universe is not only dependent

upon God for its origin, it depends upon God for its continuity of existence. The universe can neither exist nor operate by its own power. God upholds all things by His power. It is in Him that we live, and move, and have our being.

The central point of the doctrine of providence is the stress on God's government of the universe. He rules His creation with absolute sovereignty and authority. He governs everything that comes to pass, from the greatest to the least. Nothing ever happens beyond the scope of His sovereign providential government. He makes the rain to fall and the sun to shine. He raises up kingdoms and brings them down. He numbers the hairs on our head and the days of our life.

There is a crucial difference between the providence of God and fortune, fate, or luck. The key to this difference is found in the personal character of God. Fortune is blind while God is all-seeing. Fate is impersonal while God is a Father. Luck is dumb while God can speak. There are no blind, impersonal forces at work in human history. All is brought to pass by the invisible hand of Providence.

In a universe governed by God there are no chance events. Indeed, there is no such thing as chance. Chance does not exist. It is merely a word we use to describe mathematical possibilities. But chance itself has no power because it has no being. Chance is not an entity that can influence reality. Chance is not a thing. It is nothing.

Another aspect of providence is called *concurrency*. Concurrency refers to the coterminous actions of God and human beings. We are creatures with a will of our own. We make things happen. Yet the causal power we exert is secondary. God's sovereign providence stands over and above our actions. He works out His will through the actions of human wills, without violating the freedom of those human wills. The clearest example of concurrency that we find in [Scripture](#) is in the case of Joseph and his brothers. Though Joseph's brothers incurred true guilt through their

treachery against him, the providence of God was working even through their sin. Joseph said to his brothers, “But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive” (Genesis 50:20).

God’s redemptive providence can work through the most diabolical actions. The worst offense ever committed by a human being was the betrayal of Christ by Judas. Yet the death of Christ was no accident of history. It was according to the determinate counsel of God. Judas’s act of wickedness helped to bring about the best thing that ever happened in history, the Atonement. It is not fortuitous that we refer to that day in history as “Good” Friday.

## Summary

1. The concept of divine providence is not generally believed in our day.
2. Providence includes God’s work of sustaining His creation.
3. Providence refers chiefly to God’s government of creation.
4. In light of divine providence there are no impersonal forces such as fortune, fate, or chance.
5. Providence includes concurrence by which God works His divine will through the wills of His creatures.

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