

## PROVIDENCE OF GOD

Romans 8:28 - How does God work today? How exactly do "all things work together for good" for Christians? The answer can be found in a study of God's providence. One way our western, pluralistic culture has infiltrated the church is through the pagan worldview that says that God is entirely isolated from creation, which is the false teaching of deism. That God is just a bystander in heaven looking down, perhaps occasionally 'cheering' for those who may be on His side.

### THE DEFINITION OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE

God's providential hand can be seen throughout the pages of Scripture. Even though the word may not be used, the doctrine of God's providence is there. Simply stated, providence is the means by which God provides for His creation. The term originally comes from the Latin word providentia, meaning "foresight" or "precaution," and the Greek word pronoia (used in Acts 24:2 and Romans 13:14), meaning "forethought" or "provision."

**Pro-vidence = Pro** – before -- **Vidence** – being able to see **Providence = to see before** - If you look up the definition for the word provision – it means: a measure taken beforehand to deal with a need or contingency. God in his power and might, sees my needs in advance, and he operates in this natural world, to take care of us. God works in our lives, He provides for us, He cares for us, He looks out for us! God's omnipotence is His ability to rule the world, His sovereignty is His right to rule the world, and His providence is the means by which He rules the world.

**FOUNDATIONS TO PROPERLY UNDERSTANDING GOD'S PROVIDENCE** - We see God's providence in Ephesians 4:6, where Paul says, "There is One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

**First, God is transcendent and in control of all things ("over all").** (Heb. 1:3; Isa. 55:9).

**Second, God is immanent in the world ("through all").** (Col. 1:17)

**Third, God is preserving nature and its processes ("in all").** (John 5:17).

**ANTI-PROVIDENCE VIEWS - ATHEISM: "THERE IS NO GOD."** Atheism is the declaration that God does not exist.

**CALVINISM: "GOD HAS EVERYTHING TO DO WITH EVERYTHING."** It holds that God is the only cause behind everything in the universe; that everything that has ever happened or will happen is dependent upon God. Nothing is by chance, but everything happens because God wanted it to happen. This is called divine determinism, which is the Calvinist doctrine of predestination.

**SECULARISM: "GOD HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ANYTHING."** This view completely ignores God altogether and attributes every event in the world either to mankind or some kind of metaphysical natural law.

**PENTECOSTALISM: "NOTHING IS PROVIDENTIAL; EVERYTHING IS MIRACULOUS,"** Those who hold this view not only affirm the reality of God's work in the world, but they go to the extreme of interpreting everything as a miracle. (Gen. 1; Psa. 33:9), (cf. Ex. 24:1-9; Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:2-4), (cf. Gen. 2:1-3), 1 Cor. 13:8-13; Eph. 4:8-16; cf. John 20:30-31; Rom. 10:17).

**DEISM: "GOD CREATED THE UNIVERSE THEN WALKED AWAY."** While theism (the view found in Scripture) acknowledges God's eminence and providence in the world, deism totally removes God from any interaction with His creation.

**PANTHEISM: "THERE IS NO CREATION IN WHICH SOME SORT OF GOD CAN OPERATE."**

If the opposite of atheism is Calvinism, then the opposite of deism is **pantheism**. Deists believe the universe is totally separate from God, and pantheists believe the universe is totally one and the same as God.

**GOD'S NATURAL PROVIDENCE** - Because God is rational and orderly, He generally acts in a consistent manner. Nature is predictable for the most part. (Gen. 8:22). (Acts 17:28; cf. Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3). (Matt. 5:45). (cf. John 2:1-11).

**GOD'S SPECIAL PROVIDENCE** - Special providence is when God intervenes in the natural processes of nature. (cf. Gen. 45:4-8; 50:19-20). (cf. Est. 4:14). (cf. Provo 16:33). (cf. Josh. 23:9; Judg. 3:28; 1 Sam. 23:4; 28:19; Isa 10:5, 15-16). (1 Sam. 2:6; 2 Sam. 12:18; Job 34:14-15; Jas. 4:15). (cf. Josh. 23:9; Rom. 13:1; Hab. 1:6). (Job 34:24; Psa. 75:7; Dan. 2:21) (Prov. 21:1). (Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; Rom. 8:28). (1 Sam. 26:19; 2 Sam. 24:1; 1 Chron. 5:26; 2 Chron. 21:16; Ezra 1:1,5; 6:22; 7:27).

**First, we know God can influence human decisions by subtly altering the processes of nature.** God can do all of this - influencing the weather, our bodies, and animal life - without using miracles. Much of God's providential work can be explained using natural events. **Second, God can influence human decisions by manipulating a series of natural events.** God can so orchestrate events that they produce outcomes that will ultimately accomplish His Will and the welfare of His children (Rom. 8:28).

**GOD'S MIRACULOUS PROVIDENCE** - God purposefully intervenes by influencing the free-will choices of man in natural ways. In God's miraculous providence (or, just "miracles"), God bypasses the way things naturally happen to produce a desired result.

**PRINCIPLES FOR UNDERSTANDING GOD'S PROVIDENCE** - **First, God will never providentially operate in a way that is contrary to His nature or His Word.** (Lev. 19:2) (Psa. 145:17), (Jas.1:13-14).

**Second, God will never providentially operate in a way that violates man's freedom of choice.** (cf. Josh. 24:15; Matt. 23:37; John 5:39-40; Rev. 2:5,16,21-22; 3:3, 19; 22:17). **Third, God's special providence must be distinguished from God's miracles.** (John 11:43-44), (Dan. 5:5), (John 6:13). **Fourth, God's special providence is not usually easily discernable.** (Est. 4:14). (Phile. 15).

**SOME PROMISES MADE TRUE THROUGH PROVIDENCE** - **1. THE BIBLE PRESERVED FOR US**

**2. NO TEMPTATION TOO GREAT FOR US** **3. HARDSHIPS WORK IN OUR FAVOR** **4. OUR PRAYERS ANSWERED**

### CONCLUSION

Christians are part of a great "household of faith" (Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:19), and as such, we have a Great Father who provides (Mal. 2:10; Matt. 23:9; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:6; 1 Pet. 1:3). Throughout life's hardships, we cling to Paul's words, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Rom. 8:28). Hardships may come, but they cannot separate us from the love of Christ and eternity with Him (Rom. 8:37-39).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Christians are sometimes reluctant to acknowledge God's providence in the world today?
2. In your own words, what does providence mean?
3. What three attributes are essential in properly understanding God's providence?
4. What are six anti-providence views today? How do they fit on a spectrum in relation to the Bible?
5. What is God's general providence?
6. What is God's special providence?
7. What is God's miraculous providence?
8. What are some principles that help us better understand God's providence?
9. Will God override your ability to make free moral choices?
10. What are some promises for Christians today that can be only be true if God is presently working in the world today?