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**GOD'S PROVIDENCE A SOURCE OF COMFORT AND COURAGE
TO CHRISTIANS..**

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THERE are few persons who deny, in terms, the Providential government of God. But many adopt theories which are, in truth, a practical denial of it.

I. Some contend that god governs the world exclusively by general laws. That, in creation, he imparted to the various forces, physical and moral, certain qualities which continue unchanged and unchangeable, and by their interaction produce the entire series of events.

Whatever glory this theory may be supposed to reflect upon the CREATOR, it is utterly inconsistent with the idea of Providence. It represents God as flinging the Universe from his creative hand, to work out its destiny unguarded and unchecked. It is, in fact, but a disguised form of the doctrine of fate. Every event is the result of necessity. As the watch marks the hour, or the vane veers to the wind, because they are formed to do these things, so man and all other beings only accomplish their predestined and necessary ends.

II. Others advocate a complex theory. As to ordinary individuals and common events, their existence and end result from fixed laws--the laws of nature--but God interposes to raise up distinguished characters, and to bring to pass great events. His Providence, they say, resembles a map upon which are marked the mountains and large rivers, the towns and cities; while the hills and gently undulating vallies, the smaller streams, little villages and the habitations of the people are unnoticed. National calamities God orders and controls, great men for important crises he raises up and guides. But there is no eye ever watching over the multitude, no hand providing for their wants, administering to their happiness and soothing their sorrows. God may enter the palace of the prince, but he passes, unheeding, the hovel of the peasant.

It needs but little reflection to perceive the absurdity of this theory. Great events are but the aggregate result of innumerable trivial causes. Distinguished characters spring from a long line of unnoted ancestry. The revolution in which our fathers battled with Great Britain for their birthright of freedom, and which gave existence to a nation late so prosperous and happy, but now dismembered and groaning under wrong and oppression, even as the pen of history traces its origin, sprang from no one mighty iniquity, but from a long continued series of comparatively slight grievances. If Washington were the Chief of a special providence, to what shall we ascribe the soldiers who fought his battles? Could he have achieved his success without them?

III. It is alike the doctrine of reason, and of God's word, that God governs the world. He "hath prepared his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom ruleth over all." By general laws, and by direct interpositions, he works out his purposes. "He doeth his pleasure in the armies above and in the earth beneath."

To present in detail the proofs of this, will not be attempted. Two passages of Scripture will sufficiently illustrate the teaching of the sacred volume.

1. In the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples occurs this petition, "Give us day by day, our daily bread." Here then, the provident care of God is invoked for the supply of one of the most common and constantly recurring wants. The prayer supposes God to control all the agencies which enter into the production and distribution of food. This prayer is to be uttered by the thousands of Christians in all times and among all nations. Who can fail to see, in the light of this simple and sublime direction, that Jesus regarded the providence of God as at once special and universal?

2. Those accustomed to read the Bible anticipate, as the second reference, that discourse of our Saviour in which he would fortify his followers against anxious care. "Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Consider the lillies of the field how they grow; they toil not neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." "The very hairs of your head are all numbered." Could language be more explicit? Could illustration be more forcible? God adorns the lilly with its beauty. God garners the good of the wandering sparrow. God numbers the hairs of his people. Yes, God's hand is every where, and in every thing. "Thou openest thy hand and satisfieth the desire of every living thing." Anon, God would punish a people for their sins. The heavens become as brass, and the earth as iron. Famine, gaunt and ghastly, stalks forth in her work of desolation. "The pestilence that walketh in darkness" sweeps a generation to its doom. War, ensanguined and horrific, spreads terror and death on every side.

IV. In order to derive comfort and courage from this great truth, it must be firmly believed. A weak, or a wavering faith may serve us when skies are bright, and favorable winds fill our sails. But when the dark tempest howls and rages around us, we need a firm, unyielding trust. Such a faith the Christian should ever maintain. The Scriptures at once demand its exercise, and furnish the amplest ground upon which to rest it. The character of God as therein revealed; express declarations; incidental proof, and narratives illustrative of the divine government, all combine to originate and sustain such a faith.

And yet the pious, even, in periods of great distress, come to doubt of God's providential care. David records of himself many such periods of distrust and despondency. In the xxxi. Psalm he says "I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes." Such despondency is not peculiar to him. Asaph felt it. His experience is recorded in the lxxiii. Ps. As he witnessed the oppressions of the good, and the prosperity of the wicked, and writhed under personal suffering, he exclaimed, "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain and washed my hands in innocency." But when he drew near to God in his sanctuary, his doubts were removed, his complaints hushed, and with adoring gratitude he acknowledged the continued care of his heavenly Protector. "Whom have I in heaven but thee?"

and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." Thus, too, David soon recovered his confidence and felt strong and joyful in God. "I trusted in thee, O Lord: I said thou art my God. My times are in thy hand." My times of suffering and deliverance, of sorrow and of joy--all my times are in thy hand. Nothing can befall me but by thy appointment, or permission. Here I rest confident and secure.

V. To our comfort and encouragement it is also necessary to acquiesce, heartily, in God's providence.

One may feel that God reigns, and that it is useless to contend with him, while yet the heart shall rebel against his government whenever it crosses its own purposes, or mars its happiness. To man, with such a spirit of sullen submission, there is, there can be nothing but apprehension and misery. Like the serf of an Eastern despot, he trembles though he dare not resist, he shudders though he dare not complain.

Several considerations may be mentioned as concurring to produce a feeling of joyful acquiescence in the providence of God.

1. God has a right to reign.

When we admit the right of government, every correct principle and ingenuous feeling prompts to submission. He who rebels against rightful authority is a traitor. Resistance to usurpation and tyranny is a virtue, but to resist rightful authority is among the greatest crimes. Whenever the heart recognizes God's absolute right of government, nothing but depravity can lead to resistance or complaint.

God made all things, and he has the right to govern them.

2. God reigns in Wisdom.

Human rulers, with the best established authority and the purest intentions, may err. But God's government is ordered in perfect wisdom. Every reflecting man feels that he is incompetent to self-protection. The intricate and multiplied machinery of events we cannot comprehend. There are forces, known and unknown, constantly at work within and around us, which we can neither control nor withstand. "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Who can calculate the issues of an hour? Who, with prevision and steady hand, can direct his bark over life's changing and billowy ocean to a predetermined haven?--Alas! We are blind and need a guide. We are helpless and need a protector. For these wants the all-wise government of God provides. "He seeth the end from the beginning." He can make no mistake. He is too wise to err.

3. God reigns in Goodness.

His providence is, generally, kind to all. "He maketh his sun to rise upon the evil and upon the good, and sendeth his rain upon the just and upon the unjust." How vast and numerous are the blessings bestowed upon mankind--life, and health, and friends; civil protection and domestic happiness. Truly "His paths drop fatness." Thus God, by his goodness, is constantly calling men to repentance.

True, many afflictions befall us. The good and the bad suffer. But the severities of God's providential government are rather corrective than retributive. Especially is this the case regarding God's people. They may not enjoy a greater measure of earthly prosperity or happiness than others. But their affliction, permitted by paternal love to chasten and purify them, are part of the process by which their Father is preparing them for fuller and sweeter communion with himself in this world, and for heaven at the end. "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose." When the pious man can realize these truths he joyfully acknowledges God's providence. At times mists may gather and obscure his vision, but he has only to recall the "exceeding great and precious promises" of the Holy One--to remember how, through shadows dark as midnight he led old Jacob until, with tears of joy, he fell upon the neck of beloved Joseph and exclaimed, "I thought not to see thy face, but God hath shewed me thy seed also," to reflect upon the mercies of God to himself, and soon faith will re-assert its power and exclaim, "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and knoweth them that trust in him."

VI. Such a firm, acquiescing faith in God's Providence prompts to earnest, believing prayer. David said, "But I trusted in thee, O Lord; I said, Thou art my God. My times are in thy hand."

PROVIDENCE OF GOD

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

*2 Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill,
He treasures up his bright designs,
And works his sovereign will.*

*3 Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.*

*4 Judge not the Lord by feeble sense
But trust him for his grace,
Behind a frowning Providence
He hides a smiling face.*

*5 His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.*

*6 Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain.*