

Dear Friend,

This is now the seventh article in our series investigating the doctrine of God's Providence. This month I want to pause and reflect on our response to the knowledge of God's Providence.

The chief thing that God reveals about himself in the doctrine of Providence is that he is always present and always working. "The heavens declare the glory of God." "In him we live and move and have our being." He is not a god who is far away or whose presence can only be experienced through some esoteric spiritual experience. Every moment of every day God's presence and purposes and power are being put on display for the whole universe to see. And God's glory is not only seen in nature but in every aspect of human activity and culture as well. God's glory is seen in cars and bridges and iphones and art and athletic ability and novels and the internet and loving families and neighbors helping fill sandbags to stop the flood from reaching your house and satellites in outer space and the list goes on and on.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning captures both the reality of what providence means and the primary response it ought to illicit in us in her short poem:

"Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries."

The first response, after God has given you eyes to see him in everything, is worship. Worship is joy and delight in God that is expressed in praise. The Scriptures are full of this response to God's providential care of his universe. Psalm 147 is a command to praise God and a list of reasons for why it is good to do so. Most of the reasons for praise are related to God's providential care. He determines the number of stars. He sends rain and makes the grass grow. He creates physical safety for the city, he blesses your children, he gives peace with the surrounding nations, he provides with abundant food, he gives snow, he sends hail and cold, he melts the snow and makes his winds blow and on and on.

We must remember what C. S. Lewis says about praise. It is what every human naturally does in response to the things and persons in which we delight. Praise is the verbal expression of our joy in people and things. What we delight in is God as he is seen in everything and out of our joy we praise: we sing and declare his greatness. We glory in his glory. The apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20-24 that the fact that we do not glory in God as he reveals himself in everything is the chief evidence of our perversion and the primary reason for God's wrath against us. Seeing God in everything and glorifying him as we see him is the chief duty of humanity.

Following close upon the heels of joy and praise as we see God in all things is gratitude. We are grateful people as we see God caring for us and creation in the multitude of ways that he does. We are grateful because it is always true that God is "good to all, he has compassion on all he has made." Again, this helps us understand why God is so angry

about grumbling and complaining. It is the opposite of how we ought to live in this world in which God governs and directs everything. God's providence is the reason we are "to give thanks in all circumstances." There has never been and never will be a time when we will not have reasons to give thanks to God.

We also are contented and courageous people as we see God in everything and every event and every circumstance. We are content because we know that God will give us everything we need to live out the lives he has called us to live. Greed and envy and discontent are crushed as we recognize God's loving and wise and good and just hand in every event we encounter. We are courageous in our love for others because we are confident that God is expressing his love through our love and because we know that we cannot lose anything that we need to live the life God has called us to live.

We work and act but we do so without panic or fear or envy because we know it is not our work but God's work that matters. This is one of the main points of growth in my life. I often feel overwhelmed with all I think I need to do and so I panic and become harsh and demanding and impatient with those around me. The only reason I am not worse than I am is due to those times I call to mind that God is always working and if I don't complete some of my tasks it will be OK because God will accomplish all that needs accomplishing. If it doesn't get done by me doesn't mean that God's will is not going to be done.

Finally, the knowledge of God's providence motivates believing prayer. The Bible clearly teaches us that God gives every human, both the wicked and the good, both non-Christians and Christians the food they need to eat. Yet, Jesus commands us to ask God to give us the food we need in the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread." Also, just prior to Jesus' giving to us that prayer he commands us to not pray like pagans who believe that the quantity of words used will determine God's response. He says our prayers should not be like that because "your heavenly Father knows what you need before you ask him." If he is my Father and he knows what I need, then why do I need to ask? The answer is that this is how children live with their omniscient and omnipotent Father. Because he knows and because he is going to provide we should ask. This led John Calvin to say: "God has promised us nothing that he has not also commanded us to ask of him in prayer." Therefore we are people who ask God to do what God says he wants to do. When we are unsure what God might want to do then we express our desires as Jesus did, "not my will but yours be done."

Seeking to live in God's world,