

Dear Friend,

In June of 1995 while attending my first seminary class on the campus of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, "God, Man and Christ", taught by Dr. Wayne Grudem, God graciously awakened me to his nearness, his "immanence" as I came to understand and rejoice in the doctrine of God's providence. I was not completely unaware of the idea of God's providence but my knowledge was splintered and fragmentary. As I read about and then discussed this doctrine in class it was as though a bright light was turned on and I saw God where I never saw him before. I began to rejoice in how near he was to me and had been to me since the moment I was conceived in my mother's womb. I understood for the first time that it really is true that "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

As you may have heard me say on more than one occasion, one of the main things I learned in going to seminary is that we, the church of Jesus, have forgotten a lot of things. There was a time in the church when the doctrine of God's providence was a well known, cherished and lived doctrine. Understanding and living in light of this doctrine affects everything: your work; how you live as a single person, a spouse, a child, a parent, a grandparent, an aunt; how you live in your church; how you respond to the weather; your praying; your emotional condition; how you respond to suffering and evil; how you live as a citizen; indeed everything about you is affected by this doctrine. This month I am beginning a series of articles in which we will examine this doctrine and its implications for our lives. I will use several articles beginning with this one to investigate a few of the biblical texts that teach this doctrine and then we will think about how this doctrine affects how we live. In the process of this extended discussion we will also examine several key questions that this doctrine provokes.

Before we look at one of the premiere texts stating God's providential care of his universe I'd like to consider a definition. The Westminster Shorter Catechism addresses providence this way: "What is God's Providence? God's providence is his completely holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing every creature and every action." As we consider various texts we will see that his is an excellent summary of this amazing doctrine.

Psalm 135:6 says, "Whatever the Lord pleases, he does; in the heavens and on the earth, in the sea and all deeps." The first thing this verse tells us is that God is a person who has desires, pleasures, things he prefers over other things. There are things that God values; things that he loves. God considers various outcomes and courses of action and he takes pleasure in certain goals and ends and it is in keeping with these pleasing purposes that God acts. The second thing this verse tells us is that God is omnipotent in his power. Whatever he pleases he does. God says in Isaiah 43:13, "No one can deliver out of my hand, when I act, who can reverse it?" When God determines that he is pleased with a particular course of action he has sufficient power to do what he pleases. Nothing and no one can resist or reverse what he pleases to do.

To say that a person acts according to his or her pleasures is not necessarily a good thing. Adolf Hitler took pleasure in the thought of a world without any Jews and, having sufficient power through his army, he acted according to what he pleased and murdered 6

million Jewish men, women and children. We can rest and rejoice in the knowledge that God does whatever he pleases because we know who God is. In Deuteronomy 32:4 Moses says about Yahweh, "He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he." Paul says in Romans 11:33, "O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out!" Psalm 145:8 says, "The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all. He has compassion on all he has made." This Lord who does whatever he pleases never does wrong, is always just, is faithful to all he has promised and said, is infinite in his wisdom, is good and full of compassion and love towards all he has made. Therefore, we can be absolutely confident that what the Lord is pleased with is good and good for us. He never desires anything that is evil or wrong. All that he pleases is in keeping with who he is.

This is great and glorious good news for us as we live in a world in which we have little power to do what pleases us. As the recent flooding in southern Wisconsin, the earthquake in China, the typhoon in Myanmar, the rise in gas prices, the closing of the GM plant shows us; we do not live in a world in which we are in control. How joyful it is to know that the world is not a random collection of mindless, purposeless causes and effects nor is it controlled by a malicious or capricious being. We live in a universe in which the infinitely wise, just, faithful and loving Creator does whatever he is pleased to do. In next month's article we will begin to consider some of the things that God tells us he is pleased to do.

Seeking to rest in the Rock,