

PROVIDENCE

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord. Proverbs 16:33

In 1636, the Reformed Baptist theologian, Roger Williams, founded what is now one of the oldest cities in New England on the eastern coast of the US. He had been expelled by the Puritan leaders from the Massachusetts Bay Colony over what he termed a 'liberty of conscience' issue and the unfair treatment of the Native Americans. His wanderings led him north and he was able to buy some land from the First Nations, where he settled in peace with them. He named the settlement **Providence** in honour of God's merciful dealings in **guiding** and **directing** him to the place, and within two years had founded the First Baptist Church in America there in the place called **Providence**.

What a strange sounding name for a city in today's culture, a culture and age that wishes to extinguish the God of Heaven and Earth from human thought and consciousness.

I'm surprised that the city of Providence hasn't undergone a name change in its almost 400 year history. Nevertheless, the name of the city stands, for those who wish to enquire, as a testimony to one of the great doctrines of God known as **PROVIDENCE**.

1. What?

Some seventy-three years before Roger Williams named his settlement Providence, a **Catechism** was drawn up in the German city of Heidelberg - questions and answers for memorization - and it addressed this very question so as to educate believers in the scriptures and the theology of the Bible.

Question 27: What do you understand by the providence of God?

Answer: *The almighty and ever-present power of God, by which God upholds and governs, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty, all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand.*

- 1. Jeremiah 23:23-24; Acts 17:24-28
- 2. Hebrews 1:3
- 3. Jeremiah 5:24; Acts 14:15-17a; John 9:3; Proverbs 22:2
- 4. Proverbs 16:33
- 5. Matthew 10:29

And so, we can say with Solomon and all Biblical authority and unashamedly:

"The lot is cast into the lap, [in what might be a seemingly random, unorganised fashion] but its every decision is from the LORD."

Proverbs 16:33

We don't have to watch a science programme on TV too long before we hear about the laws of Nature. If you are a believer in the inspired scriptures, you know and believe that God created the entire cosmos and that He didn't wind it up as it were and walk away to let the laws of Nature keep the whole thing 'ticking'.

No! He also sustains it. He commands the winds and the waves and they obey Him. He makes the sun to shine on the just and the unjust.

⁵*God thunders marvellously with His voice;
He works wonders that we cannot understand.*

⁶*He commands the snow, "Fall to the ground!"*

And the downpour of rain, His mighty downpour of rain. (Job 37:5-6)

Not only is the origin of the cosmos with God *but* its continued existence is also with God. It cannot exist without Him, either in its beginning or in its ongoing operation. God's hand brought it into being and sustains it now.

Indeed, the scriptures identify more particularly Who it is that does this. Paul speaking of Jesus Christ says in Colossians 1:15–17:

*"All things were created **through him and for him**.¹⁷ And he is before all things, and **in him all things hold together**."*

If the Lord Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, were to withdraw His hand nothing could hold together. Events would fall apart. The material stuff everywhere would fall apart. Everything would fall apart!!

That is the WHAT of Providence.

2. So What?

Question 28: How does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help us?

Answer: *We can be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing shall separate us from his love. For all creatures are so completely in His hand that without His will they can neither move nor be moved.*

1. Job 1:21-22; James 1:3
2. Deuteronomy 8:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:18
3. Psalm 55:22; Romans 5:3-5; 8:38-39
4. Job 1:12; 2:6; Proverbs 21:1; Acts 17:24-28

You can neither move nor be moved without God Almighty willing it and directing it for His purposes. Those who move against you, speak against you, plot against you do so in the **Providence** of God.

Those new pains, those worrying pulsations, those frequent moments of forgetfulness come to you in the **Providence** of our gracious God.

Those tests that bring you face to face with that familiar sin, those whisperings to leave off the disciplines of prayer and Bible study, those thoughts to lay aside your trust in God altogether - yes these come to you in the **Providence** of God.

At this point you might be saying, with James, "But God tempts no-one". Yes, God *tests* our faith and when we approach those tests and trials in our own strength and wisdom, instead of with trust and faith in God's supply, we fail and the test becomes a temptation into which we fall and from which God is glorified even then in drawing us out of the pit that we've dug for ourselves and fallen into.

The greatest crime committed since ever God spoke creation into existence was committed in the **Providence** of God - the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It passed through His hands and His holy will. We can say of it, with Joseph, that it was intended for evil but God meant it for good.

Peter, on the day of Pentecost, announced in the power of the Holy Spirit:

"This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawlessness".

Acts 2:23.

The sacrifice of Jesus was provided for our good and for God's glory, so *He who spared not His own Son how shall He not also freely give us all things?* Whatever has lain in our path in the past and does so today, and shall do tomorrow, shall be for your good and for God's glory.

What's the answer to SO WHAT?

It is well, it is well with my soul - WHY?

Because Christ has regarded my helpless estate
And has shed His own blood for my soul.

3. Now What?

Now what for us here in the NICS, the Stormont Assembly not sitting because of political stalemate, an energy crisis, money not buying as much as it used to, the fear of Covid once again rising?

The LORD has brought us to this point, for He directs all things to their appointed purpose. He has total 'hands-on control'. Someone has said **His hand may be hidden, but his rule is absolute.** The LORD appointed us as Civil Servants from the first day until this day to utter every word that we ever spoke, for our good and His glory.

Every conversation, every kind deed, every business meeting, every prayer, every phone call - the whole lot has been cast into our laps and every outcome is from the LORD.

Now what? The same LORD has appointed different voices, younger voices with more ideas, fresh vision, more business meetings, more prayers, more phone calls.

Now what? 1 Corinthians 15:58:

"My beloved brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

Now what? 1 Thessalonians 5:25 :

Brothers, pray for us (and for one another)."

Now what? Acts 20:32:

"And now we commit ourselves to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build us up and to give us the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

And the people of God said – AMEN.