

The Ancient Counsel of Providence and Your Salvation – Eph 1:3-6,

11

The Strong Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ #7

Introduction – “God’s works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions” (WSC 11). God controlling everything can sound kind of freaky at times. But it helps to step back and consider how wonderful this truth is, especially when it comes to our salvation and the message of the Gospel. The foundation of this truth is rooted in the very character of a personal and powerful God who knows you – and knew you before the world ever was. The Gospel is not an add-on by God after mankind blew His perfect plan. It turns out that we were chosen before the foundation of the world with all things being predestined for the purpose of our salvation, the reconciliation of the world to God, and all that for the greater manifestation of His gracious glory.

Chosen and Predestined: An Overview of our Text – Writing to the church at Ephesus, Paul declares that God chose us (v4) and not that we chose Him (John 15:16). He chose us to be holy and not because we were holy (Rom 9:11). These things are proven by the fact that this election took place before the foundation of the world. We were also chosen to be without blame before Him and not because we were without blame. This is the flip side of the coin of justification; all of the guilt for all of our sins are gone (Psalm 103:12, Isaiah 38:17). All of this was done in the context of love (v4). In other words, God loved us simply because He freely loved us and not because of anything in or about us (Deut 7:6-8).

In the context of this love, He also predestined us, or predetermined in eternity past, to adopt us by Jesus Christ Who brings us to the Father (v5). And here is the really wonderful news: He did this because He wanted to; He desired to, it was His pleasure to do so (v5). This redounds to the praise of His gracious glory (His glory which is gracious). That glory is not sterile white fluorescent light. It is a warm rainbow of love and mercy, with favor and acceptance “*in the Beloved.*” It is dripping with grace. This is why God predestined what He predestined.

Dropping down to verse 11, we are given more to consider regarding God’s providence and predestination of all things. The Greek word translated, “*we have obtained an inheritance,*” could just as easily, and possibly more appropriately be translated, “*we have been made an inheritance.*” The strength of this view is that it has Old Testament precedence (Deut 7:6-7, Psalm 33:12, Jer 10:16) as well as New Testament significance (Eph 1:18). All those who are “*in Christ*” are God’s possession and heritage.

And how did it all come together? “*being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will*” (v11). God had a plan, a story some say, and He “works” it or “energizes” all things according to that counsel, that plan.

God’s Works of Providence – My point is to let Scripture blow your mind in regard to the powerful authority of God at work in the salvation of the world and you. First, God’s works of providence are rooted in that predestined counsel of His will. God is therefore not reacting in surprise over the events of His Creation. This testifies to His omnipresence, His omniscience, His omnipotence and His infiniteness. And this leads to consider the efficacy of His providence over everything.

Over the Natural World – God is not only at work when miracles take place. He is at work in the events of the world He created. “*You visit the earth and water it...*” (Psalm 65:9-10, 135:6-7, 147:15-18, Acts 14:17). Seemingly random acts are under God’s sovereign control (Prov 16:33, 1 Kings 22:34). So are what we consider normal, mundane events (Matt 5:45, 6:26-27). Natural events come from God, the personal Lord.

Over Human History – He created man from the natural world, the dust (Gen 2:7), and so if God controls the events of nature, certainly He also controls the course of our own lives – including all the “random acts” that brought the very seed and egg which produced your conception – and the innumerable accidents that had to happen to produce all of your ancestors. He governs the events of all nations (Psalm 33:10) as well as individual lives (Gen 45:5-8, 50:20). Of course the greatest act of wickedness was completely under the providence of God (Acts 4:27-28). His providence is in the womb (Psalm 139:13-16) and over the loss of life (Ruth 1:13, 1 Sam 2:6-7), and all the steps in between (Psalm 37:23-24). This is why the breakable bones of Jesus could never be broken (Psalm 34:20, John 19:33).

Providence over Sin – Sinful hearts freely choose to do evil, but Scripture is clear that God does in fact bring about the sinful behavior. He hardens hearts (Rom 9:18). He turns hearts to hate His people (Psalm 105:25), makes them refuse to listen to wise counsel (1 Kings 12:15) and gives them a spirit of stupor (Rom 11:7-8). It is God who gives us over to our lusts (Rom 1:24-28). The presence of sin is no evidence of a lack of the universal providence by God.

Providence over our Salvation – And thank God for this. “*Salvation belongs to the Lord*” (Jonah 2:9, Psalm 3:8, Rev 7:10). It is according to His purposes before time began (2 Tim 1:9) and of course is nothing but a free gift (Eph 2:8-9), given to us when and how He chooses (Matt 11:27, Acts 13:48, 16:14).

The End, the Result, the Goal – The chief end of all this is found in the beginning of our text: “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...*” The goal is not the salvation of the world. That is the means. The end is the glory of God. The result is the praise to His gracious glory. The chief end of God is the glory of God. And that is why His gospel is so strong.

