

The background is a detailed landscape painting. On the left, a tall, dark pine tree stands on a grassy bank. In the foreground, large, light-colored rocks are scattered along the edge of a body of water. The water is a soft, pale green. In the distance, a large, rugged mountain rises against a sky filled with soft, yellowish clouds. The overall style is reminiscent of 19th-century landscape art.

PURITAN  
*Treasures*  
FOR TODAY

*Special Providence  
for Anxious Souls*

OBADIAH  
SEDGWICK

EDITED BY J. STEPHEN YUILLE

*Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin?  
And not one of them falls to the ground apart  
from your Father's will.*

MATTHEW 10:29

The Puritans gave particular attention to expounding the wonders of God's special providence because of its deep pastoral significance. They were persuaded that few things are as encouraging and uplifting as the realization that God governs all creation in the interest of His people. The Puritans encouraged people to see God's special providence as an effectual remedy for fear, despair, anxiety, and numerous other ailments of the soul.

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"Like many of the Puritans, Obadiah Sedgwick was a physician of the soul. This skillfully abridged edition of *Special Providence for Anxious Souls* offers believers much-needed antidotes to their troubles and worries drawn out of the Scriptures—from the very nature and character of God. This delightful gem will provide encouragement to weary sufferers and direct their gaze back to the God of all comfort."

**Nate Pickowicz**, pastor of Harvest Bible Church, Gilmanton Ironworks, New Hampshire; author of *Overcoming the Darkness: Biblical Help for Spiritual Depression*

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OBADIAH SEDGWICK (ca.1600–1658) was a Puritan pastor and prominent member of the Westminster Assembly. His other works that have modern editions include *The Anatomy of Secret Sins*, *Christ's Counsel to His Languishing Church*, and *Providence Handled Practically*.

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## Special Providence for Anxious Souls



# Special Providence for Anxious Souls

Obadiah Sedgwick

Edited & Abridged  
by J. Stephen Yuille

Puritan Treasures for Today  
Series Editor: J. Stephen Yuille



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Grand Rapids, Michigan

*Special Providence for Anxious Souls*

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Second Edition

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## *Preface*

“Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will” (Matt. 10:29). I like to imagine that a flock of sparrows flew overhead as Christ uttered these words and that His disciples lifted their eyes to observe a common occurrence that had so often escaped their notice. How many sparrows dotted the sky since the creation of the world? Relatively speaking, sparrows are insignificant. Yet Christ proclaims that not one of them dies apart from God’s will. He is not simply saying that God is aware of every sparrow’s death. His words imply much more than that. He is emphasizing that God governs every sparrow’s death. The inference is obvious: if God’s providence extends to something as trivial as the sparrows, then it extends to us as well. We can be certain that He governs His creation (general providence) in the interest of His people (special providence).

The apostle Paul writes, “And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things

to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:22–23). We acknowledge two kingdoms. The first is Christ's spiritual kingdom whereby He rules by His Spirit and Word in the hearts of His people. The second is His providential kingdom whereby He rules over the world, governing all things. Here is a wonderful truth: Christ rules His providential kingdom for the good of His spiritual kingdom. In other words, God has arranged the world's history in reference to the destiny of His people. As John Flavel declares, "The church is God's special care and charge, and He rules the world for her good."<sup>1</sup> That is the reason we sing:

*Praise to the Lord, who o'er all things  
so wondrously reigneth,  
Shelters thee under His wings, yea,  
so gently sustaineth!  
Hast thou not seen how thy desires e'er have been  
Granted in what He ordaineth?*

When we speak of God's providence, we are acknowledging that He "works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11). This means that there are no random events, freak accidents, chance encounters, or rogue molecules. God's knowledge is perfect. He knows what was, what is, what will be, and what can be. He knows all things perfectly and immediately—at

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1. John Flavel, *Works*, 4:350.

every moment. Moreover, God's power is perfect. He has never encountered difficulty, let alone impossibility. Every detail of every life was in the mind of God before the foundation of the world. "Marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well" (Ps. 139:14). We have but one response to such splendor—we prostrate ourselves before the throne of God's providence.

For starters, our wisdom lies prostrate before the throne of God's providence. As I sit in a plane, awaiting takeoff, I have a very limited view of things. From my seat (yes, economy), I can see several people sitting nearby; I can see the stewards and stewardesses; I can see the little movie screen in front of me; and—through the window—I can see a couple of planes taxiing out to the runway. But someone is sitting in the air traffic control tower who sees the entire airport. He has access to monitors that show him the flight path of every plane in the air. His view is very different from mine. Similarly, God's view is very different from ours. Our knowledge of things is severely limited, whereas God's knowledge is absolutely limitless. We judge circumstances according to our finite perspective, but God knows all things by one infinite act of understanding. "Can anyone teach God knowledge?" (Job 21:22). The answer is a resounding *no*. The fact that God's providence exceeds our comprehension should not surprise us. We cannot fathom the blessed and only Sovereign, the One who dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:15–16). We can sooner

contain the sun in a small cup or the ocean in a small shell than God in our limited understanding.

Second, our will lies prostrate before the throne of God's providence. God has no rule but His own will. For this reason, all of His actions and commands are righteous. He does not will something because it is right. Something is right because He wills it. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, has a dream in which he sees a tree cut down and a man whose mind is changed into that of an animal. Daniel interprets the dream, explaining that the king will be humbled because he has taken credit for the rise of Babylon. God will humble Nebuchadnezzar until he recognizes that "the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses" (Dan. 4:25). For seven years, the king roams the fields like a wild animal. Finally, he declares,

[God's] dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
And His kingdom is from generation  
to generation.

All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed  
as nothing;

He does according to His will in the army  
of heaven

And among the inhabitants of the earth.

No one can restrain His hand

Or say to Him, "What have You done?"

(Dan. 4:34–35)

He is God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth (Gen. 14:19). He has no rule but His own will and, therefore, all His judgments are righteous.

Third, our effort lies prostrate before the throne of God's providence. God keeps all things in existence, causes all things to act as they do, and directs all things to their appointed end. He governs the snowflake and the supernova and everything in between.

Unless the LORD builds the house,  
They labor in vain who build it;  
Unless the LORD guards the city,  
The watchman stays awake in vain. (Ps. 127:1)

Here, Solomon uses two conditional clauses to affirm that all human effort lies prostrate at the throne of God's providence. The first concerns God's provision: "Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it." Solomon's point is straightforward: the construction of a house is vain apart from God. Why? God is the ultimate cause of all things. The mortar does not set, the bricks do not hold, the edifice does not stand apart from God's providence. The second conditional clause concerns God's protection: "Unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain." Solomon knows it is important for the watchman to stay awake in the dead of night. He is not insinuating that they are free to sleep on the job. But he is pointing out that, even when surrounded by thousands of vigilant watchmen, a city's

safety still rests with God. Ultimately, protection comes from Him because He is the cause of all things. The most advanced warning system and most sophisticated weaponry will not protect anyone apart from God's providence.

Fourth, our hope lies prostrate before the throne of God's providence. Many of us struggle with affliction and its accompanying sorrow. We feel like the mythological figure, Atlas, with the weight of the world upon our shoulders. Oftentimes, affliction is beyond our control, and we are powerless to do anything about it. Our sense of helplessness is increased by our limited view of what God is doing. At times like these, we want answers to the question *why*, yet we must hold to what we know. We know God governs all things according to the pleasure of His will. There is no pain He cannot remove, no danger He cannot prevent, no misery He cannot comfort, no enemy He cannot vanquish, and no need He cannot supply. We take great comfort in the realization that "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Humility arises from a biblical understanding of who we are and who God is, which leads to absolute submission to, and absolute dependence upon, God. "It is," says John Owen, "to humble our souls to the law of God's providence in all His dispensations—to fall down before His sovereignty, wisdom, righteousness, goodness, love, and mercy."<sup>2</sup> This

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2. John Owen, *Works*, 9:119.

is likely what Paul means when he writes, “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content” (Phil. 4:11). He had to learn to be content because it went against his nature—pride. Likewise, we must learn to subdue and humble our soul (Ps. 131:2). When we do, the result is contentment—an indispensable quality when it comes to waiting confidently and expectantly for what God has promised.

Because of its deep pastoral significance, the Puritans gave particular attention to expounding the wonders of God’s special providence. They were persuaded that few things are as encouraging and uplifting as the realization that God governs all creation in the interest of His people. Recognizing the close relationship between God’s special providence and the believer’s spiritual comfort, the Puritans encouraged their people to meditate regularly upon the doctrine of divine providence. The present volume is an outstanding example of such meditation. It comes from the pen of Obadiah Sedgwick (1600–1658). Here is seasoned pastoral counsel, grounded in Scripture, and flowing from deep communion with God.

Sedgwick beckons us to look to God’s special providence as an effectual remedy for fear, despair, anxiety, and numerous other ailments of the soul. In short, we know that God’s wisdom is not our wisdom, and His ways are not our ways (Rom. 11:33). But God’s plan is best. We know the Son of God has entered history, assumed our nature, and suffered for us to bring us to God. We know

our heavenly Father has our best interests in view. "He knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust" (Ps. 103:14). God is all-knowing; therefore, His plan is perfect. God is sovereign; therefore, His control is absolute. God is incomprehensible; therefore, His providence is inscrutable. Here is a source of great comfort amid myriad trying and perplexing circumstances that arise in life.

My prayer is that you will grow in your appreciation of the mystery of God's providence, that you will stand in wonder at His wise fatherly superintendence of every circumstance in your life, and that you will be strengthened in faith as you rest in the One from whom, through whom, and to whom are all things (Rom. 11:36).

—J. Stephen Yuille

## *Introduction*

“Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matt. 10:29–31). These words contain a great comfort for the disciples and all the church of Christ amid oppositions, persecutions, and miserable evils. It is drawn from the providence of God. The church is like a ship at sea, endangered by waves and winds, but divine providence sits at the helm, powerfully guiding and preserving it.

The disciples might stand in fear of the endless and boundless rage of wicked people who have power in some measure answerable to their malice. But Christ says, “Do not fear.” He gives two reasons. First, evil people can only “kill the body” (v. 28). That which is more precious than the body is safe, for they “cannot kill the soul.” Second, nothing can befall the disciples apart from God’s providence. Their Father is not idle, nor is He asleep. He does

not forget them or their condition. He regards them and watches over them. He wisely and graciously orders every occurrence for His glory and their good so that not the least thing befalls them that He does not direct.

Knowing that some people might doubt this truth, Christ points us to the sparrows that fly here and there. No one notices them. One person hunts them for food while another person kills them for pleasure. But not one sparrow falls to the ground without our Father ordering it to occur and permitting it to be so. It does not come by idle chance but by His working providence. That being the case, do you think that anything befalls you without your Father noticing it, ordering it, and governing it? No! If God has an eye on the sparrows, you may be confident that He has a special care for you. He not only orders the great moments of your life and death, but “the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” He knows them all and He attends to them all. And if He knows the very hairs of your head, how much more does He care for your person, safety, and preservation!

There is much that I do not need to say in this book because the verses speak for themselves. I will only emphasize those things that reveal to us something of the doctrine of divine providence.

## CHAPTER 1

### *A Definition*

God's providence extends to all creatures and all the details concerning them. In the text, we see that it extends to the sparrows, particularly their deaths. Thus, it also applies to the souls and bodies of His people as well as to the very hairs of their heads. This is evident in Psalm 33:13–15.

The LORD looks from heaven;  
He sees all the sons of men.  
From the place of His dwelling He looks  
On all the inhabitants of the earth;  
He fashions their hearts individually;  
He considers all their works.

In Psalm 104, we see God's providence reaching from the upper chambers of heaven to the lowest rooms and foundations of the earth, the seas, the mountains, the valleys, the beasts, the birds, the sun, the moon, and the people.

But what exactly is providence? It is an external action of God whereby He conserves and governs all

things wisely, holily, justly, and powerfully to the admiration of His own glory. Let us observe several points.

First, providence is an action. God did not make the world and then leave it on its own. He attends to His creation with the working influence of continual providence. He still looks upon it and deals with it. It is for this reason that Paul says, "For in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Some people call this action the virtue of God: a strong impression that He makes upon His creatures, both concerning their nature and operations. Others call it the will of God working effectually upon His creatures. I believe both are correct.

Second, providence is an external action. The actions of God are distinguished according to internal and external. The internal are those that affect the three persons of the Trinity, such as begetting, being begotten, proceeding, and all other actions that are confined among them. The external actions are those that look out to the world in which all the persons of the Trinity are involved. The eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit are proper actions restrained to one person of the Trinity, meaning they are not common to them all. But creation and providence are actions common to all the persons of the Trinity; each person partakes of these actions.

Third, providence is an action of God. There is a kind of providence that we ascribe to people, but it is weak and restrained. It only concerns those things that

pertain to us and our own sphere of influence, and even then, it is very feeble. We cannot foresee all occurrences, determine any issues, or command anything as its nature requires. Providence appertains to God alone. (1) No one is fit to govern the world except He who made it. (2) No one is fit to order and direct the creatures except He who knows which way to turn them because He put a variety of inclinations in them. (3) No one is fit to sustain, restrain, and accomplish things except He who has infinite wisdom and power in His own hands. Therefore, providence is an action of God alone.

Fourth, providence extends to all things. There is no created thing over which God does not exercise His providence. He “humbles Himself to behold the things that are in the heavens and in the earth” (Ps. 113:6). Likewise, “the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth” (2 Chron. 16:9). God’s providence sustains the most excellent creatures, and it does not neglect the most contemptible creatures. His providence reaches not only to the angels in heaven but to poor people who dwell upon the garbage heap. It extends not only to the glorious stars but to the lowest piles of grass and lilies. It extends not only to our immortal soul but to the very hairs on our head.

Let us notice three things here. (1) Providence is coextensive with creation. Therefore, it is as large as heaven and earth, indeed, as large as the whole world. (2) Providence is coextensive with divine knowledge

externally. "Known to God from eternity are all His works" (Acts 15:18). (3) Everything is kept in order and harmony. Although it may appear confusing to us, there is no disorder. All things meet in the exact end that He has intended and to which He directs them. There is not any creature nor any action of any creature nor any change of any creature nor any occurrence, issue, or event that is not under the powerful eye of divine providence. Those creatures that seem to work in a more necessary and natural way and those that seem to work in a more noble and arbitrary way are all sustained, ordered, and guided by God. Like the head of a family whose care extends to his wife, children, servants, oxen, sheep, house, and land, God's providence extends over the great family of heaven and earth.

## CHAPTER 2

# *The Acts of Providence*

In the last chapter, I defined providence as an external action of God whereby He conserves and governs all things wisely, holily, justly, and powerfully to the admiration of His own glory. This definition identifies two acts of providence.

### *Conservation*

The first is conservation or preservation. The preservation of things is the great finger of divine providence. The apostle says that God upholds “all things by the word of His power” (Heb. 1:3). Job declares, “You have granted me life and favor, and Your care has preserved my spirit” (Job 10:12).

God’s conservation of things is described in two ways. First, it is immediate, that is, by “the word of His power.” Second, it is mediate, that is, by ways and means. He “gives food to all flesh, for His mercy endures forever” (Ps. 136:25). He “covers the heavens with clouds,” “prepares rain for the earth,” “makes grass to grow on the

mountains,” and “gives to the beast its food, and to the young ravens that cry” (Ps. 147:8–9). Let those who are His servants hearken to the words of Christ, “Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?” (Matt. 6:30). He adds, “For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things” (v. 32)—food, drink, and clothing. The means of preservation are sometimes open, meaning they stand directly before our eyes. For example, we see this providence when we receive food to sustain us, drink to refresh us, friends to help us, and power to rescue us. Sometimes, however, the means of preservation are secret. God may bring us good in a way that we could never have imagined in a way entirely beyond our thoughts.

Furthermore, God preserves things by two ways. First, He preserves them in their created consistence. They are safe and sound, not corrupted or changed. In this way, angels, our souls (abstractly considered), and the heavens are preserved by providence. Second, He preserves them in a manner of succession and propagation. This is a lengthening of things by a new generation. “You renew the face of the earth” (Ps. 104:30). God preserves humanity upon earth, for one generation dies but another is born. He preserves His church on earth, for some members die but others live and survive. He

preserves the seasons of summer, autumn, winter, and spring in a change of revolution and succession.

### *Governance*

The second act of providence is governance. God controls or moderates all things through His providence. He moderates good and bad so that nothing happens by chance or fortune but according to His own counsel for place, time, manner, and event.

First, God keeps things in that order in which they were first created. "They continue this day according to Your ordinances, for all are Your servants" (Ps. 119:91).

Second, God excites the inclinations of the creatures. For example, He stirred up the heart of Lydia to hear Paul's preaching (Acts 16:13–15), and He stirred up the heart of Cyrus to do good works in His church (Ezra 1:1).

Third, God directs all inclinations, motions, and actions for His own glory as the agent directs the instrument. He directs these things even though they are instruments for the persecution of His servants (Phil. 1:12).

Fourth, God restrains, hinders, and prohibits the unlawful actions of His creatures, which they would otherwise do. For example, Abimelech was restrained from touching Abraham's wife (Gen. 20), Laban from harming Jacob (Gen. 31), and the angel from destroying the Israelites when he killed the firstborn in Egypt (Ex. 12:23). God prohibited the sun in Joshua's time from running its

course, the fire from burning Daniel's companions, and the sea from overwhelming the Israelites as they passed through. He prohibits the infinite malice of the devil and the wrath of evil people against His church.

Fifth, God effects all good. Every moral, natural, or spiritual good comes by a commission from divine providence. Do you have health, peace, plenty, safety, and comfort? By His providence, God has given you all these things. "[These are] the children whom God has graciously given your servant," said Jacob (Gen. 33:5).

Sixth, God permits evil. Augustine says, "Nothing may be unless the Omnipotent wills it to happen. He either permits it to be done or He Himself does it." This leads to a great and weighty question: How does the evil of sin fall under divine providence? All things fall under divine providence but in four different ways. (1) By causation or production. The producing and approving will of God is the cause of all good things. (2) By permission. God does not effectually hinder the free inclinations of the creature. Thus, sin is under His providence, not because He causes it or approves it but because He permits it by leaving the sinner to himself or to Satan. (3) By limitation. God deals with sins in this way. He says to Abimelech, "I...withheld you from sinning against Me" (Gen. 20:6). He checks and restrains evil people who otherwise would put no bounds or measure to the vilest kind of sinning. (4) By judgment. "So I gave

them over to their own stubborn heart, to walk in their own counsels" (Ps. 81:12).

Seventh, God judges evil people. Providence appears in this regard in many ways. For example, God defeats the plots of the wicked, smites them with diseases, turns their schemes on their own heads, and overthrows them with a variety of sudden deaths. He does this even when they attempt to do most hurt to the church of Christ.



### CHAPTER 3

## *The Qualities of Providence*

Providence is an external action of God whereby He conserves and governs all things wisely, holily, justly, and powerfully to the admiration of His own glory. Here we see that it bears four qualities.

The first is wisdom. God does all things with singular wisdom. As He made the world by wisdom, so He governs it by wisdom. The wisdom of God's providence is manifest in the fitting of means and the hitting of times, in leading out an intended issue through difficulties, and in bringing everything to its best end.

The second is holiness. God moderates, restrains, guides, suffers, and deals in everything after a most holy manner. He is holy in all His ways. We must distinguish between what people do and what God does. People sin, but God does not sin. His providence concerning sin is good and holy, though the sin itself is as vile and odious as the sun on the dunghill.

The third quality is justice. God's providence so orders things and events that it brings matters about

in such a way that no one has reason to accuse God or complain about Him. If we could pry into the secret reasons of things or see the special ends that God has in His eye, we would sit down and admire the wonderful proceedings of His justice. If the church is afflicted, if enemies prosper, if good things are far away, if evil things are close by, God is just in all these things. God is just even though the wicked are not presently punished nor the church presently delivered.

The fourth quality is power. How is it possible for all the creatures to be upheld except by power? How can the opposition of the devil and his instruments be limited and defeated except by power? How can deliverance break into the church against all hope except by power? When we see great matters done by weak means and God working strange effects without means, wonderfully turning people's hearts, this declares that there is great power in providence.

## CHAPTER 4

### *The Effects of Providence*

Scripture is very clear concerning this matter. When you read of any good that God produced, any evil that He prevented, any occurrence that happened just as He foretold, any protecting, any supporting, any comforting, any delivering, any friends stirred up to show kindness, or any raising of someone out of obscure conditions to unexpected greatness, it expressly shows that there is a providence. These things show that there is a God who has care and concern for the works of His hands. They demonstrate that there is a God who has His eye on this world.

Effects do not arise from second causes according to their desire and intention. Therefore, there must be a providence to bring forth these effects. There are those who labor night and day, who beat their brains and break their sleep seeking to enrich their estate, but they cannot multiply and enrich themselves. "It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late" without the blessing of the Lord's providence (Ps. 127:2). You have the same constitution,

the same air, the same diet, the same recreation, and the same outward comforts in all respects as another, yet clothes do not warm you and food does not nourish you as it does the other. Why? It is because divine providence grants the blessing to the one and withholds it from the other. For this reason, Solomon says, "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong" (Eccl. 9:11). It is God's providence that brings about the effect. There are many devices in an individual's heart, yet none of them are effective. Although we may say, "I will have it this way" or "I will have it that way," God brings forth an effect that is neither the one nor the other but a third way that we could never have imagined.

Things are brought about even when we judge it unlikely. This proves that there is an active and working providence. For example, Joseph is to preserve Egypt and his father's house alive, but he is captured by his brothers, cast into a pit, sold to the Midianites, thrown into prison, and eventually freed to be a ruler. He says to his brothers, "God sent me before you to preserve life" (Gen. 45:5). He confirms God's providence, "As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (Gen. 50:20). Likewise, David is to be a king, but Saul throws his javelin at him, sends men to kill him, hunts him in the mountains, and banishes him from his country. Eventually, however, the crown is set on David's head. Another example is Israel. God promised to deliver

them from Egypt, but Pharaoh deals craftily with them, imposes harder bondage, and makes them serve with greater rigor. But God delivered them.

If there is a God, then there must be providence. God is the first cause, which is absolutely most active. All second causes depend for being and operation upon the first. Nothing can move or preserve itself by itself. God gives motion and preservation to all things. The transference of kingdoms, the rewards and punishments of people on earth, and the changes in our condition all show that there is providence.

Finally, consider the attributes of God. Is He not most wise, most just, most merciful, and most powerful? Then how can things be neglected? How can they happen by chance?



## CHAPTER 5

# *Objections*

Some people challenge the notion that God's providence orders, preserves, limits, and punishes on the basis that (1) the vilest sinners go unpunished, (2) evil people prosper in their ways, and (3) the best people are oppressed with many needs, afflictions, and persecutions.

### *Solution 1*

The lack of God's immediate execution of vengeance upon evildoers is not a sure reason for denying the existence of providence. God is gracious, patient, and longsuffering, even toward those who despise the riches of His forbearance. God's providence appears in the subsequent punishment of sinners. If evil people were permitted to continue unpunished forever, then there would not be a providence. "Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow,

because he does not fear before God" (Eccl. 8:12–13). Elsewhere, we read, "The sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed" (Isa. 65:20). Paul writes, "Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later" (1 Tim. 5:24). Sometimes God takes the sinner in the act of his sins but sometimes several years later when the sinner has filled up the measure of his sin. Sometimes God reserves the wicked for the great day of wrath. Therefore, there is a sure punishment, though not always a present punishment, for every sinner.

Moreover, there are different sorts of punishment. Some are visible. At times we see that God has rewarded the proud according to his pride and the sinner according to his sin with some notable disgrace, disease, or curse. But other punishments are invisible. In this case, God gives up sinners to a reprobate mind, seared conscience, and impenitent heart. He strikes their conscience with horrors and accusations that torment them like hell itself.

### *Solution 2*

The prosperity of the wicked does not disprove a divine providence, for God will magnify His bounty in outward things, even to the wicked. Though they are wicked, they are creatures too. "For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). God does not bestow these things on them to maintain and reward their sinning but to

uphold their being. It is a wise providence that evil people have so much of outward things because it teaches us that no one should esteem these outward things to be the chief good. That which the worst people possess cannot be the best good.

It would have been better for them to lack those outward blessings, for God's bounty to them and their abuse of that bounty increases their guilt. At the best, their great estate is decaying like a flower and like the grass (Ps. 37:1–2). Furthermore, because they have tasted so liberally of God's kindness and have used it against God's glory, their felicity will be short, and their misery will be endless.

### *Solution 3*

It is true that good people are oppressed with many wants and needs, but no good person ever lacked anything that was good for him. I may lack a thing that is good but not that which is good for me.

For the LORD God is a sun and shield;  
The LORD will give grace and glory;  
No good thing will He withhold  
From those who walk uprightly. (Ps. 84:11)

The goodness of a thing to me consists in convenience and suitability. Food is good but not to the sick stomach because it is inconvenient at that time. Liberty is not always good for a good person, nor is health. Many things may be good for some good people that are not

always good for every good person. Therefore, it is not a true lack or need.

The goodness of an estate does not consist in the abundance of goods but in the contentment of the mind. The person who has a contented heart with a little portion has a good estate. A good stomach, a clean house, and a little food is far better than a large table, a dark chamber, and a sick heart. A good person has no true lack so long as his conscience is clear, and he enjoys God's loving favor. If you judge providence based on abundance, then you will see that riches and goodness may meet together as well as riches and wickedness; honor and goodness may meet together as well as honor and wickedness. Abraham was as wealthy as most in his time, and he was second to none for faith and obedience. David had the crown on his head and the scepter in his hand. No one came close to Solomon in terms of riches, state, and wisdom. We do not find that every wicked person is mighty in his estate, nor do we find that every good person is low and poor. If we should set the one against the other, we would discover that for every good person with a poor estate, there are thousands of wicked people whose condition is beggarly.

Should we stand upon great estates here in this life when God has settled a great inheritance above? If a sufficiency of food and raiment for you and your family—along with the blood of Christ, the precious promises of God, the consolations of the Spirit, and

the assurance of heaven—cannot prove a liberal providence for you, then you need to get more faith to know the ways and expressions of a good providence. “Oh, how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You” (Ps. 31:19).



## CHAPTER 6

# *God's Special Providence*

In addition to God's general providence over creation, God has a special providence over His people. We see this in the words of our text, "The very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matt. 10:30), that is, guarded and protected. "You are of more value than many sparrows" (v. 31). By this we see that the Father regards His people far more intimately and affectionately than those outside His church.

This is evident when we consider some singular expressions in the Scripture that reveal a special manner of providence. "For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'He sent Me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye'" (Zech. 2:8). There is not a part of the body that we defend more than the eye, and there is not a part of the eye of which we are more vigilant than its apple (or pupil), for it is the principal organ of sight. In this verse, God professes Himself to be as sensitive to the needs of His church, to

have as tender a regard to His people, as anyone can to guard the principal part of his eye.

Can a woman forget her nursing child,  
And not have compassion on the son of  
her womb?

Surely they may forget,  
Yet I will not forget you. (Isa. 49:15)

A mother expresses the greatest tenderness toward her children. Though she cares for others, she is most tender to her children. Her affection is greater for a child of her own womb than for her neighbor's children. And of all the children of her womb, she expresses the greatest tenderness to the infant who is nursing. Likewise, by His general providence, God observes, disposes, and works for every creature in the world, yet in a far more special and singular way, He cares for His own children. "See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me" (Isa. 49:16).

He will feed His flock like a shepherd;  
He will gather the lambs with His arm,  
And carry them in His bosom,  
And gently lead those who are with young.  
(Isa. 40:11)

God has a double flock—a great flock in respect of creation and a little flock in respect of election. Though He looks on both, His principal care extends to His

people. As the shepherd has a distinguishing eye and discriminating tenderness with respect to his lambs, so God calls His people His "jewels" (Mal. 3:17). It is true that a wise woman does not neglect the cheapest household goods, but, of all things under her care, none are locked away but the precious jewels. God's care of His jewels is the same.

I, the LORD, keep it,  
I water it every moment;  
Lest any hurt it,  
I keep it night and day. (Isa. 27:3)

The ark of the covenant was a type of the church. It was always covered with the wings of the cherubim, pointing to divine protection. Hence it is that God's eyes are said to be over the righteous. He has a special watchfulness over them, as we see in Psalm 125:2.

As the mountains surround about Jerusalem,  
So the LORD surrounds His people  
From this time forth and forever.

He is called the refuge, defense, rock, shield, salvation, tower, and deliverer of His people.



## CHAPTER 7

### *Protection*

We see that God has a special providence over His people when we consider the acts of His providence: protection, permission, and preservation. In this chapter we will give our attention to the first of these.

God's protection is His impeding or hindering of evil. Though evil may be intended against the church, though it may be contrived with the craftiest strategy, though it may be armed with the most terrible power, though it may be ready to rush forward like an overflowing flood, God hinders and prevents that evil. He delivers His people as a bird out of the snare. He removes them as a fire brand out of the fire.

When Pharaoh devised a method of ruin for the Israelites by tormenting them with cruel bondage and destroying their posterity, God hindered him. When Ahithophel gave malicious counsel to Absalom's followers, God interposed and turned aside his intention by giving more acceptance to the advice of Hushai. When Haman plotted the death of the Jewish nation merely

because of Mordecai's disrespect, and when he raised up the gallows to hang him and secured the command to destroy the rest of the nation, God hindered his design and wondrously preserved them. All their plots and intentions are like a ship ready to launch but is hindered by a contrary wind. When Saul pursued David like "a partridge in the mountains" (1 Sam. 26:20) and surrounded him so that there was no escape, God hindered him. When Sennacherib came against Hezekiah, threatening with blasphemous insolence to swallow him and his people, God put a hook in his nostrils, turned him, and hindered his proud threats and intentions.

The prophet Isaiah declares,

Be shattered, O you people, and be broken in  
pieces!

Give ear, all you from far countries.

Gird yourselves, but be broken in pieces;

Gird yourselves, but be broken in pieces. (Isa. 8:9)

He adds,

Take counsel together, but it will come to  
nothing;

Speak the word, but it will not stand,

For God is with us. (v. 10)

Eliphaz says,

[God] frustrates the devices of the crafty,  
So that their hands cannot carry out their plans.  
He catches the wise in their own craftiness,

And the counsel of the cunning comes quickly upon  
them. (Job 5:12–13)

But He saves the needy from the sword,  
From the mouth of the mighty,  
And from their hand (v. 15)



## CHAPTER 8

### *Permission*

The second action of God's special providence is His permission. If God permits any miserable evils, if He does not totally restrain the operations and intentions of wicked people, but they exercise the poison and scourge of their malice upon the church, God still shows Himself. How?

First, He moderates their boundless rage. He curbs the power of the mighty and the wrath of the cruel. He binds the raging waves of the sea, saying, "This far you may come, but no farther" (Job 38:11). Likewise, He stints the pride of the wicked as He did the insolent desire of the devil against Job. "And the LORD said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person.' So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD" (Job 1:12).

Second, God moderates external troubles with inward comforts. Though the body smarts, the conscience still smiles. Though the estate is stripped, the soul is still cheered. When Paul was close to being torn

in pieces, he was brought into the barracks (Acts 23:10–11). Paul provides his own commentary in 2 Timothy 4:17, “But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me.” When wicked people suffer, they suffer all over. They suffer within as well as without. They are like people with a fever, extremely scorched with heat, not only in the visible and bodily parts but in the inward parts. Though a storm assails good people from without, they enjoy a calm within. They are like a person in a castle. The inward rooms are all quiet and still though the blustering winds beat upon the outer walls.

For You have been a strength to the poor,  
A strength to the needy in his distress,  
A refuge from the storm,  
A shade from the heat;  
For the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm  
against the wall. (Isa. 25:4)

Third, God turns their miserable evils into spiritual good. All the rage of the wicked is like poison tempered by a skilled and tender physician, whereby it is turned into medicine. All their blustering is like the wind to the wheat, clearing it of the chaff. It is like fire to the gold, purging it of the dross. It produces repentance, sorrow, meekness, patience, faith, zeal, heavenly mindedness, and love for Christ and His truth within God’s people. These things spread with more purity and beauty, like the stars, with more glory in the darkest night.

## CHAPTER 9

# *Preservation*

The third act of God's special providence is preservation. "O LORD, You preserve man and beast" (Ps. 36:6). There is a more significant degree of preservation for the church than for others. In this comparison, Elihu says that "He does not preserve the life of the wicked" (Job 36:6). Furthermore, God is said to reject them, cast them off, and hide Himself from them. But David says of the righteous, "The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing" (Ps. 34:10). This does not mean that there is no preservation of the wicked (for the continuation of their life depends on preservation), but it does mean that this preservation is not in such a special way as that which God gives to His people. Noah had an ark when the rest of the world perished.

We see evidence of this in the following Scriptures. "The LORD preserves the faithful" (Ps. 31:23). "The LORD preserved David wherever he went" (2 Sam. 8:6).

And he blessed Joseph, and said:

“God, before whom my fathers Abraham and  
Isaac walked,  
The God who has fed me all my life long to  
this day,  
The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil,  
Bless the lads;  
Let my name be named upon them,  
And the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac;  
And let them grow into a multitude in the midst  
of the earth.” (Gen. 48:15–16)

God is said to preserve the life of the saints (Ps. 41:2), the ways of His saints (Prov. 2:8), the souls of His saints (Ps. 121:7), and the bodies of His saints (1 Thess. 5:23). Paul writes, “I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom” (2 Tim. 4:17–18). For this reason, God is called the “keeper” of Israel (Pss. 31:20; 121:5–7; Isa. 27:3). He is said to keep His people as the apple of His eye (Ps. 17:8).

For the LORD God is a sun and shield;  
The LORD will give grace and glory;  
No good thing will He withhold  
From those who walk uprightly. (Ps. 84:11)

## CHAPTER 10

# *A Wonderful Method*

In addition to seeing God's special providence over His people in the acts of His providence (that is, protection, permission, and preservation), we see it in the method of His providence, that is, the means He uses to accomplish His purposes.

God can do great good for His people even through weak means. He can strengthen a few to overthrow many. With three hundred men, Gideon chased the Midianites who were as the sand of the sea (Judges 7:7, 12).

Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and three hundred chariots.... And Asa cried out to the LORD his God, and said, "LORD, it is nothing for You to help, whether with many or with those who have no power; help us, O LORD our God, for we rest on You, and in Your name we go against this multitude. O LORD, You are our God; do not let man prevail against You!"

So the LORD struck the Ethiopians before Asa and Judah, and the Ethiopians fled. (2 Chron. 14:9, 11–12).

God has done great good for His people through strange means. Many times, He has simply put an idea or alarm in the mind of His people's enemies, and they have fled (2 Kings 7:6–7). When the Israelites came to the Red Sea, and the Egyptians were pursuing them, God chose a strange means for their deliverance. He divided the sea and commanded it to stand in two heaps until all His people had passed. When Elijah was in the wilderness, far away from the market, God sent a raven to feed him.

God has done great good for His people despite weak means. When they seemed to be cast upon unavoidable ruin, God helped them. When Daniel was cast into the lions' den, divine providence preserved him by restraining the lions. Similarly, when the three young men were thrown into the fiery furnace, divine providence restrained the flames so that they could not scorch them.

God has done great good for His people without any means at all. He has put forth His almighty hand and saved when there was no one else to deliver. "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the LORD of hosts." (Zech. 4:6). When they had no rational idea how it should be brought about, God accomplished it.

The church has more special testimonies in this area than any other people, for God has provided better things for them. They have grace in the heart, peace in the conscience, and such a savory blessing with every gift. "Better is a little with righteousness, than vast revenues without justice" (Prov. 16:8). The estate of a wicked person may be larger, but that of the righteous person is better. The quantity on the wicked person's part may be greater, but the quality of the just person's condition is sweeter. It is mercy all over. It is a blessing without a curse and a portion without sorrow. Divine providence is more precious to the church than all else. In spiritual matters, there is no comparison. In temporal things, all good is seasoned and sweetened to the church, while others find a curse in every good.



## CHAPTER 11

# *A Wonderful Result*

When we consider the result of all occurrences, we see the singularity of God's providence. Whatever the conditions are, everything still results in good. Whatever the changes are, everything still results in good. Though one condition is opposite to another and one change is opposite to another, each of them proves to be for good. "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

Divine providence compacts all the operations of second causes. God so admirably directs and commands them that, though they are like several rivers flowing in different directions, all of them flow into the ocean. Though the various agents have diverse intentions and their practices are opposite, God orders all for His glory and for the particular good of His people.

When God brings an affliction upon His servants, when He removes an outward comfort, when He denies a particular good, whatever the occurrence may be, it

descends at length like a cloud full of blessing, good, and comfort. For this reason, a person may say concerning his affliction, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" (Ps. 119:71). A person may be unwilling to bleed from the surgeon's knife, but when he sees the corruption released, he is glad about it with all his heart. He will confess that if God had granted him his desires, he would have regretted it all his days. He will confess that if God had imparted such a good at the time he sought for it, it would have marred much of the good that he now enjoys.

These particulars prove the singularity of God's providence toward the church. "He has not dealt thus with any nation" (Ps. 147:20), meaning that He has not given this providence to every person. This providence is very special, as is evident in six ways.

First, it is gracious. From a gracious affection to a gracious end, it is all for the good of those who love Him.

Second, it is tender. His eyes are over the righteous. He carries the lambs in His bosom, and He surrounds them like the hills around Jerusalem. He is a wall of fire around them. He has seven eyes, and He is very watchful against any evil that may hurt them.

Third, it is mysterious. God has many hidden methods to do us good. In the vision of the golden lampstands (Zech. 4:2), there were seven lamps and seven pipes to the seven lamps. God does good to His people by

contraries. He does them good by all the evil that befalls them. He brings life out of death.

Fourth, it is glorious. God uses not only all ordinary creatures but the very angels as ministering spirits for our good. Christ undertakes for us as a head, husband, and king. He walks among the golden lampstands and holds the seven stars in His right hand (Rev. 2:1). He is the captain of the Lord of hosts (Josh. 5:14–15). He fights for us and prevails (Rev. 12).

Fifth, it is exact. "The LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (Josh. 1:9). In addition to being exact with respect to place, it is exact with respect to time, especially when judgments and dangers are abroad. God makes an ark for Noah. He is a sanctuary and hiding place. He is a pillar and cloud (Isa. 4:5). He lifts up a standard against the flood and will not suffer the destroyer to enter (Ex. 12). He never leaves and never forsakes us. He surrounds our persons. He is present with us in the fire and the water. Not a hair of our heads falls apart from Him.

Sixth, it is miraculous. For His people's good, He divides the sea, cleaves the rocks, rains down manna from heaven, and makes the sun stand still. Against their enemies, He throws down stones from heaven and makes the stars to fight against them. He has rebuked and destroyed kings, such as Pharaoh and Sennacherib, for their sakes. He has destroyed nations too, thwarting all attempts against His people.

Why is God's providence so singular toward His people? They are the object of His singular affection. They are a chosen people, the people of His love. His delight is in them. Where love is singular, providence is special. God will give kingdoms for the ransom of the people whom He loves. He will dash in pieces the gates of hell to secure His own inheritance.

Providence runs through a singular covenant to God's people. This is a special thing. In the covenant there is an excellence of divine affection, an excellence of good, and a bond of truth and wisdom to seal and execute all this. Things befall us from God as our Creator or from God as our Redeemer, reconciled in Christ. What I do as a man is one thing, but what I do as a father is another thing. What I am as a friend is one thing, but what I am as a husband is another thing. The covenant has the precious blood of Christ, the promises of God, and the riches of His mercy. If any good is more excellent than another, either for its kind and nature or fruit and virtue, it is that which comes out of the covenant, for the fountain is all grace. God has entered into a peculiar covenant with His church; therefore, His providence works for them according to the tenor of the covenant, meaning it must be special.

## CHAPTER 12

# *Depending on God*

Is there a providence extending to all the creatures and, more specifically, a special providence extending to God's people? Then, let us learn to depend on God's providence. Our being is from Him. There is no one who is so able to fulfill our needs and no one who is so willing to do us good. All issues befall us according to the commands of His providence. We cannot command any good to ourselves, nor can we command the creatures to yield their help and assistance. They are God's stewards to lay out their strength according to His directions. When any pressure or trouble is upon us, who can remove it? Who can bless it? Only He who appointed it. Then, why would we not depend on His providence?

If God had no providence working in the occurrences that befall us, if His providence were insufficient to rule, order, guide, restrain, or deliver, if He were not all-wise and all-knowing to direct the best means, produce the best results, impart help, and remove evils at

the most suitable time, then there would be little reason to depend on God. If we should add to the continuation of our comfort by taking care, things will not be according to our desires or according to our designs. When we have laid out our own conditions, God will alter things and make it otherwise. He will forever reserve the glory of an absolute, supreme, and universal cause to Himself. Therefore, we must depend on His providence. But what does this mean?

First, it means we commit our persons and conditions to God's will, wisdom, power, and goodness. David says, "Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him" (Ps. 37:5). If there is something you desire to see realized, do not think to effect it by your own strength or wisdom. Instead, put it into God's hands. Surrender it to Him to do it for you, and trust Him for it. Christ "committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). God's people are commanded to "commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator" (1 Peter 4:19). Paul says, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day" (2 Tim. 1:12). When I acknowledge that God is the fountain of my being, my comforts, my helps, my health, my plenty, my life, my liberty, my peace, and my deliverance, I acknowledge that my eyes are upon Him, expecting these according to my particular needs. I commit these things to God, and I depend on His providence.

Second, we depend on God's providence by submitting our thoughts and affections to Him in the particular dispositions of our persons and conditions. When I want any outward good, I acknowledge God to be the Father of lights, the spring of every mercy (James 1:17). I lay down this comfort at His feet and affectionately say, "Lord, if You give me this comfort, I will bless You. If You do not give it, I will thank You. I do not seek this comfort dogmatically but submissively. Not my will but Yours be done. If this comfort may be for Your glory and my good, I desire it. If not, I desire to give it up. It may seem good to me but not to You. Therefore, I give up my comforts and desires, both the things and the times into Your hand. What You will and when You will it, let it be so."

In like manner, when we are suffering under a cross or an affliction, we must pray as follows: "Lord, You are the great and good God. Not a hair can fall from my head without Your providence. Much less can an affliction touch me. What I suffer, I have deserved. You alone are able to pardon sin and remove affliction. I desire, if it is Your will and for Your glory and for my good, that You would remove this affliction. I know all things are so ordered by Your providence that they work for good to those who love You. Therefore, if it is for my good, take away this cup from me, yet not my will but Yours be done. If it is for good, let Your hand rest upon me until You have purged out my sin and pride, until

You have perfected my patience, until You have beautified my faith, and until You have raised my heart entirely from all earthly delights to You, the highest, the only God.”

## CHAPTER 13

# *Learning to Depend on God*

Some people will say they cannot depend on God, trust His providence, commit everything to Him, or submit to His will. If we are tempted to think like this, we must consider the following.

First, we depend on something. We are creatures, and we are exposed to want and need, and these are occurrences that exceed our power. There is no one better to depend on than God. What do you see in yourself that you may securely depend on? What do you see in others? All their strength is weak, mutable, and borrowed. People die, their thoughts die, and their strength dies. But God is good in Himself. He is independent, almighty, wise, and faithful. Why would we not depend on Him? He can do what the creature cannot do.

Second, the only way to gain what is good is to depend on God. "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Prov. 3:6). When you are in any strait and you do not know which way to turn

and your friends do not know how to counsel you, lift up your eyes to God. He will point the way and direct you.

Commit your way to the LORD,  
Trust also in Him,  
And He shall bring it to pass. (Ps. 37:5)

God will make it to be, though you do not know how to reach it. If you leave it to Him, He will deliver it to you. We read,

The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD;  
He is their strength in the time of trouble.  
And the LORD shall help them and deliver them;  
He shall deliver them from the wicked,  
And save them,  
Because they trust in Him. (Ps. 37:39–40)

Third, there is no more certain way to miss what is good than to fail to depend on God. Here is the man who did not make God his strength,  
But trusted in the abundance of his riches,  
And strengthened himself in his wickedness.  
(Ps. 52:7)

What do we read about this man?

God shall likewise destroy you forever;  
He shall take you away, and pluck you out of  
your dwelling place,  
And uproot you from the land of the living. (v. 5)

Cursed is the man who trusts in man  
And makes flesh his strength,  
Whose heart departs from the LORD.  
For he shall be like a shrub in the desert,  
And shall not see when good comes,  
But shall inhabit the parched places in the  
wilderness,  
In a salt land which is not inhabited. (Jer. 17:5–6)

We find this warning in Isaiah 7:9, “If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established.”

Fourth, those who depend on God always fare well. “Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted, and You delivered them” (Ps. 22:4). Though he walked through the valley of the shadow of death, David feared “no evil” (Ps. 23:4). Why will you not depend upon Him? Why will you not trust Him to do you good? Who took care of you in the womb and the cradle? Who took care of you when you could not choose the least good or resist the least evil? Will you forsake His care now? Who took you up from your mother’s womb, and who was your God when you nursed upon your mother’s breasts (Ps. 22:9–10)? Why will you not depend upon Him to meet your needs? If He has done great things for you, will He not take care of smaller matters as well? If He has given you that which no one but God can give, will He not meet your need for food and clothing? “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all

things?" (Rom. 8:32). What is it to Him to do you good? What does it cost Him? What pains or troubles does it cause Him? He can say the word and calm all your troubles. He can speak the word and all creation will obey Him. He can command His lovingkindness and do you whatever good He pleases. What is it for Him to turn, guide, restrain, remove, or command any good to you or any evil from you? At every moment He satisfies and sustains a whole world of creatures.

Fifth, if our Father looks after sparrows, then He will look after us. He looks after strangers. How much more will He look after those of His own household! He cares for enemies. How much more will He care for His friends! He provides for those who hate Him. How much more will He provide for those who love Him! He will provide much more for His children. Is God "worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8)? Will He not provide for His own family?

## CHAPTER 14

### *A Reasonable Response*

We may encourage ourselves to depend on God's providence by reasoning from the lesser to the greater. If God clothes the grass and feeds the ravens, how much more will He do for us? We must also reason from the greater to the lesser. If God has given us His Son, how will "He not with Him...give us all things" (Rom. 8:32)? If He has given us grace and glory, He will not withhold any good thing (Ps. 84:11).

We may also reason from things past to things present. David says, "The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine" (1 Sam. 17:37). We may also reason from things past and present to things future. Paul trusted that He "delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us," and "we trust that He will still deliver us" (2 Cor. 1:10). David remembers what God had done and was still doing for him, and thereby concludes, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" (Ps. 23:6).

We may also reason from large relations to special relations. God's providence extends to strangers. Will it not extend to those of His own household? If it extends to His enemies, will it not extend much more to His children?

Furthermore, we may reason from the ancient effects of providence to the church for a providence suited to our present condition. God has thought on His church in her low estate. He delivered Israel out of Egypt, overthrew Pharaoh, rescued David, preserved the Jews against Haman's plot, and built the temple and the walls of Jerusalem amid plots and scandals in Ezra's and Nehemiah's time. God thought of Joseph in the prison, Daniel in the lions' den, the three young men in the furnace, and Jonah in the whale's belly. He gave rest to the church in the midst of bloody persecutions in Paul's and Constantine's time. He saved Israel by the three hundred men of Gideon, defeated the Philistines by Jonathan and his armor-bearer, delivered King Asa by a few against several thousand, Hezekiah from Sennacherib, and Jehoshaphat from the children of Ammon and Moab. Certainly, the church is still under the same providence if we but bring the same vessel of faith and prayer.

Some people might say that they desire to have this good, but it does not come because God will not send it to them. My answer is that our desire is not to cull out good, nor is our will the rule of God's providence. God does not come at present, but He may hereafter. We

depend correctly on providence when we do not cull out our good or set a day for God to work.

Others object by saying that the case is difficult. My answer is that life is difficult for us, but is there anything too hard for the Lord? Is His hand shortened that it cannot save? What is it for Him to alter the heart, conquer the will, remove impediments, or cast in irresistible motives? He can make the Egyptians as willing to free His people as to keep them back, or as willing to adorn and enrich them as they once were to oppress and spoil them. Nothing stands in His way as a bar against His power. The depths of our misery, the hopelessness of our insufficiency, the deadness of visible means, the combination of powerful insolence, the conspired intentions of ruin are all nothing to Him. His arm alone can do it. And that which is infinitely exalted above all strength cannot be opposed.



## CHAPTER 15

### *The Causes of Anxiety*

Is there a general providence extending to all God's creatures and, more specifically, a special providence extending to God's people? Then, let us learn not to vex and disturb our minds. Christ taught His disciples that, since there is a God who cares for the grass and the lilies and a Father who cares for them, they should not be anxious (Matt. 6:28). Their hearts should not be troubled. Peter advises us to cast "all [our] care upon Him, for He cares for [us]" (1 Peter 5:7). By this, Peter means that we must not perplex ourselves about our conditions. We may ease ourselves of all this worry, for there is a God who takes care of us, who minds us, who thinks on us, who will provide for us.

Paul writes, "Let your gentleness [moderation] be known to all men. The Lord is at hand" (Phil. 4:5). We must not trouble ourselves with excessive grief, inordinate desire, or impatient suffering as if there were no one near to help us. "The Lord is at hand." He is our help, strength, supply, and comfort. He is not far from

us. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (v. 6). This means that, whatever our condition may be, we are not to afflict ourselves with fears, worries, and anxieties. Instead, we are to bless God for what we have and pray for what we lack. And then, we are to leave all things to God. "Surely they busy themselves in vain," declares the psalmist (Ps. 39:6). There are many things that vex us.

The first is the futility of means. At times, we desire a particular good and, though we know God is able to do it, we perceive a deadness in the means. We cannot see any testimonies or probabilities in the second causes to encourage us by feeding our hopes and expectations. As a result, we fret over our unhappiness and the pressures that we experience.

Second, we fret over the difficulty of events. We look for light but see only darkness. We expect God's favor but seemingly meet with disregard. We ask for comfort but are arrested with sorrow. We ask for plenty, but the answer is poverty. We seek security, but a shipwreck of many losses has sunk our estates. At times like these, the soul is filled with disturbing thoughts. It torments itself with excessive sorrow, melancholy, and bitterness.

Third, we fret over the absence of necessities. There is no more to sustain us than what passes from hand to mouth. We are like a candle that is fed with a single drop of oil. If you do not add another, the flame goes out. The

weakness of our condition grieves and distracts us. It causes us to thrust out many violent demands and questions. What will I eat? What will I drink? Will I die?

Fourth, we fret over the strength of afflictions. This occurs when we suffer under a cross that is close to our heart, or it occurs when afflictions come like Job's messengers—one had barely delivered his message when another brought news of another loss. These kinds of afflictions are perhaps the most difficult tidings. It is a sad condition when afflictions come upon us like waves in the sea, one riding on the neck of another, or like soldiers in battle, one giving fire after another. In such a case, we imagine that we have good reason to be angry, impatient, and annoyed. We act as if there were no divine providence in such a condition as this.

Fifth, we fret over the unreliability of circumstances. Unexpected limitations and interruptions often arise after reasonable and probable procedures. We have chosen good means, and we have consecrated them through prayer, and we have endeavored with all faithfulness and uprightness to pursue lawful desires, and it seems that God has smiled on our initiative. But suddenly everything changes. God brings our plans to a standstill or turns them in a different way just as the sun may shine, but a cloud comes and covers it, hiding its warmth. In such a case, the heart becomes anxious. It is troubled and disquieted. It stands still. It does not know what to make of God's providence.

Sixth, we fret over the uncertainty of posterity. Perhaps a man has many children but little means and few or no friends. Perhaps the children's mother has died, the children are young, the goods are divided, and the man is dying. Here, armies of cares and fears multiply in his mind. The man's soul is full of concerns. When all his plans and devices are summed up, they come to nothing. They contribute no effectual relief or solution. The man is troubled and wonders what will become of his children.

In the following chapters I will endeavor to show you how the goodness, wisdom, and power of God's providence removes all these causes of anxiety.

## CHAPTER 16

### *Futile Means: Part 1*

Let us discuss the first cause of anxiety, which is the futility of means. Either they do not exist, or they do not work. They do not produce any good. It seems they are asleep. Though we knock, they withhold the good assistance that God has placed in them. In times such as these, we must look to the powerful method of God's providence. We do so by remembering seven truths.

First, the fountain of our good is not in the means. They are simply the channels that grant access to the ship. They are merely the pipes that convey the water. The spring of all good is in heaven. When you are sick, your health is not in the physician's hand but in God's hand. When you are needy, your relief is not in your friend but in your God. "For He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness" (Ps. 107:9). When I offer a gift to someone and he takes it out of my hand, my heart was the origin of the gift while my hand was merely the instrument. The means that we see are only the hand of God. His love is the fountain of all the

benefits we enjoy. Therefore, many times God shuts up the means. He closes the hand because He wants us to learn that our help comes from Him and that we owe all our mercies to Him. We often find that God draws us to Himself by stopping those lower wells of water. When the rivers fail, then we look to the clouds for rain. When means are no longer useful, then we look to God and say,

If it had not been the LORD who was on  
our side...

Then the waters would have overwhelmed us,  
The stream would have gone over our soul.

(Ps. 124:2, 4)

We confess that all mercy, help, and comfort are in God's hands. He who is essentially good commands and distributes every good.

Second, the means are unable to do anything on their own. They cannot incline themselves to help us unless God commands them. If God does not use them, the instruments can do nothing, just as the hammer and nails are useless unless we use them. Means do not work in a natural way but by appointment. As God is pleased to work, so they assist us. We can only look on the means until God commands them to become comforts and helps. "No king is saved by the multitude of an army; a mighty man is not delivered by great strength" (Ps. 33:16). All the means in the world are like a mill. If the wind or water comes, then it grinds the corn. But if

they do not come, the mill stands still. If God holds off from the means, if He does not breathe on them, if He does not cast a lively influence into them, they can do nothing for us. If you are troubled in mind, your dearest friend cannot comfort you unless God puts power into your friend's words. Your friend may speak words to you, but they will not comfort you apart from God's work. If you are diseased in body, the most skilled physician cannot cure you unless God puts healing into the medication. The physician may prescribe medicine, but he cannot prescribe health or life. God's providence overrules all means. They are subordinate agents, and therefore they depend on God for being, working, and restraining. They are not the absolute lords of their own operations. God has entrusted them with power to do us good, but He keeps the delivery of that good in His own hand. A master places a treasure box in his servant's room, but he keeps the key with him so that nothing is removed from the box but by his will and appointment. In like manner, God has placed the ability to do good in the creatures, but He keeps the key. God has determined that no creature should bestow its good in its own way but only according to His direction. If this were not the case, we would worship the creature.

Third, God usually takes away the effectual virtue of means when we place our confidence in them. There is a use of means, and there is a confidence in means. I may put my hand on them, but I may not put my heart on

them. If I set up means as a cause and look to them as the springs of life and death, if I put my whole condition into their hands, then I depart from God in my heart. God ordinarily dashes the confidence of such a person.

Why do you gad about so much to change  
your way?

Also you shall be ashamed of Egypt as you were  
ashamed of Assyria.

Indeed you will go forth from him

With your hands on your head;

For the LORD has rejected your trusted allies,

And you will not prosper by them. (Jer. 2:36–37)

When Israel doted on her lovers, God threatened to make her ashamed of them. Similarly, when we set our affections and persuasions on means without eyeing the great power of the all-disposing God, He will frustrate our confidence and kill the means before our faces. As a result, the means will deny their help to us.

## CHAPTER 17

### *Futile Means: Part 2*

In the last chapter, we began to consider the first cause of anxiety, namely, the futility of means. As a remedy, it is important for us to look to the powerful method of God's providence by remembering seven truths. We have considered three of these. In this chapter we will look at the remaining four.

First, God's providence seldom works and appears in set means or in such ways as we devise. There are means that He has established, saying, "This is the way, walk in it" (Isa. 30:21). These are paths that He has commanded us to follow and expect His blessing. But God seldom works through the means that our heart devises. By our own conceit, we determine that providence must work this way or that way. We say, for example, that if God does not stir up such a friend, if He does not speak through such a minister, or if He does not bless the direction of such a physician, He is impotent. When we limit providence to work in our own ways, we cause providence to hold back. God has several means to do

us good, and He does not always use the same means because He is able to do it by any. Sometimes God holds Himself back from all of them so that we learn to trust in nothing but Him.

Second, God's providence ordinarily chooses neglected and despised means. Things most appear to be gifts from God when the creatures seem to be unable or unlikely to yield any good to us. "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are" (1 Cor. 1:27–28). God brings about our temporal good by the service of the most unlikely means. For example, Naaman despised the waters of the Jordan and preferred the rivers of Damascus (2 Kings 5:10), but those waters did not cure and cleanse him. Another example is found in David. Though his brothers rebuked his audacity, Saul questioned his youthfulness, and the Philistines derided his boldness, David killed Goliath with a little stone. So, God often delivers His people, defeats His enemies, and does much good to us by weak, lowly, and unexpected instruments. The friend, who you regard as a refuge, may fail you, but a person, from whom you would not expect any assistance, may refresh your spirit. It was the poor man who delivered the besieged city (Eccl. 9:14–15). It was said of

Martin Luther, "A man without hope and without property opposes the might of the world." He was a despised monk, yet the greatest reformation in Christendom came through him.

Third, God can quicken dead means. Consider the improbability that Sarah would ever conceive a child, yet "she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised" (Heb. 11:11). These things are possible through "God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did" (Rom. 4:17). God led the prophet Ezekiel into "the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones." As he passed by them, he found that there were "very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry." Then God asked Ezekiel, "Son of man, can these bones live?" He answered, "O Lord GOD, You know." Then God commanded him to prophesy to them, and bone joined with bone, and skin and sinews came upon them, and "breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceedingly great army" (Ezek. 37:1-3, 10). That is how it is with means. When there may be little reason to expect any good from them, God can put life in them. Even when we say, "There is no hope," God can revive the root and cause it to send out the branches. When darkness has almost extinguished all light, God can create and equip the most fainting means with sufficiency of strength and assistance.

Who among you fears the LORD?  
Who obeys the voice of His Servant?  
Who walks in darkness  
And has no light?  
Let him trust in the name of the LORD  
And rely upon his God. (Isa. 50:10)

God's hand is not shortened so that it cannot save. He can stir the hearts of people and give them a charge and commission to consider your person and condition and to come with counsel, comfort, deliverance, or refuge to you.

Fourth, God is not tied to any means. The obligation here is on our part, not on God's part. He can do us good in every means, whether great or weak, whether manifest or secret. Though means fail, He can do us good without them, for He is an independent agent, and He does not borrow good to do us good. He is "able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). It is no extraordinary experience that, when we have grown tired in the use of means and they have spent their power and readiness to do us good, God shows His hand immediately. Many people have been cast aside as dead by the judgment of physicians, but God has restored them to life. Though the subject cannot perform anything without the king's seal and authority, the king can perform all things without his subjects. Second causes do no good without the consent and influence of the first cause. God can bring about His

purposes and intentions without them. He is absolute and may choose whatever means He pleases. He is wise in the use of the best means, and He is omnipotent to command all our helps and supplies.



## CHAPTER 18

# *Difficult Events*

The second cause of anxiety is the difficulty of events. This occurs when our plans and designs are disappointed, and the opposite comes to pass. In this case, we should feel out the goodness of providence and not vex ourselves. We must keep the following truths in mind.

First, God's providence has its rights. There are certain prerogatives that belong to the king, and we may not presume to encroach upon them. Similarly, there are rights that belong to God alone, and we must not seek to wrestle them from His hand. Only God is a fountain of good, and He alone is the end of all things. To determine what will come to pass is one of the rights of providence. We are to submit, declaring, "If the Lord wills" (James 4:15). Only God has the liberty to establish a particular result, and He alone has the power and wisdom to shape every occurrence to lead effectually to that result.

Second, the results of providence are better than the satisfying of our desires. Some results of providence fall out according to our desires, but providence defeats

many of our desires and makes them to be otherwise. The result of providence is always the best because it is grounded upon infinite wisdom and goodness. I may think that something is good for me, but God knows it is bad. What I desire is not good for me simply because I desire it, but that which God brings upon me is good because He has done it. I may desire plenty, but God may give me poverty. This proves to be far better than the plenty that I craved, for plenty might have been a snare to me, but my scarcity keeps me closer to God, humbler in my mind, more diligent in my calling, more dependent on God's promises, more careful in prayer, and more watchful in my conversation. Perhaps I desire health, but God brings sickness. My health in this case would not prove to be such a mercy as my sickness. My shop perhaps would have been fuller if I had my health, but my soul is now made better through this condition. Because of sickness, many people have cast anchor at heaven's gates. Without this sickness, they would have sailed with full speed to hell. You expend much effort in acquiring an earthly creature, and you expect much comfort in the enjoyment of it. But you no sooner taste it than it rises against you as a discomfort, or it is taken away from you. You must not vex at this but see the art of divine providence correcting your thinking and showing you that the creature is no more and no longer a comfort than God will make it so. Our souls must mount higher to find an ark in which to rest. Why would I not yield

to providence that has hindered an evil and done me a kindness? I may have seen the good that the issue of my desire would have brought, but I did not see the evil that was mingled with it. I did not see what evil would have come with it, or what ill effect it would have bred in my heart because I was not yet able to enjoy and use such a mercy. It is true that the result God brings is contrary to my expectation, but it is not contrary to my good. Even discomforts, though we do not relish them, prove to be the most singular consolations.

Third, there are several sorts of crossings. (1) Some proceed from ignorance. We might unwittingly let fly a word or action that proves an impediment to the design of another. (2) Some proceed from malice. We sow tares on purpose to hinder the harvest. We lay plots and devices to cross the intentions of our neighbor from the comfortable attainment of his desires. (3) Some proceed from prudence. The father crosses the will of his child, not out of ignorance but because he knows what is best. He does not do it out of malice or to annoy the heart of his dear child. He does it out of a pious wisdom, knowing that what he dislikes is best for him. Even painful treatment, though the patient does not like it, is better than the comfort he craves. God crosses events to His people out of His wise concern for their good. He does not desire to deny them the enjoyment of anything that would prove good for them but to hinder the evil that would break upon them.

Fourth, God crosses the enjoyment of our good because He has purposed to bestow upon us a better good. We cannot always discern the real proof of a good. There may be a better good than the one we crave. One outward good often hinders another because some good things of the same kind are incompatible at the same time. Therefore, God may disappoint us in the lesser, having reserved for us a more suitable good in all concurrence of circumstances. If you are crossed in your desires for a particular good, it is because God sees that it will not be good for you, or perhaps simply not good at this time, or perhaps there is a better good for you. Though you may not be able to see it now, you will see it and confess it with thankfulness in the future.

Fifth, there is a double crossing of an event: one by absolute denial and one by preparing a fit season that provides time for ripening. By a thing that is contrary, God can further our good. Though it is contrary to our expectation, it may be subordinate to God's disposition.

## CHAPTER 19

### *Limited Opportunities*

The third cause of anxiety is the weakness of our present condition, which seems too feeble to sustain us. Perhaps we have many mouths to feed but little money. God's providence will comfort the soul when we consider the following.

First, divine providence is a daily care. You see the birds and the rest of the creatures on earth. They feed today, but they do not know where to expect their breakfast tomorrow. Yet God provides a new table for them every day. They step out and find it so, and therefore they sleep quietly at night. Christ counseled His disciples to "not worry about tomorrow" (Matt. 6:34). He encouraged them to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11). If God were too weary to give you "daily bread" or too weak to provide for you, then you might have some reason to trouble yourself. But David says, "Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness" (Ps. 37:3). If you can find a hand to labor and faith to trust, God will find food to satisfy you and clothing to cover you.

Second, the blessing of providence can increase or strengthen a little until more arrives. There is a marvelous art in divine providence. (1) The art of addition. This is a strange succession of one means in the place of another so that when one ends, another begins. God sends Elijah to the brook and commands the ravens to feed him (1 Kings 17:4–6). Later, He sends him to Zarephath and commands a widow to sustain him (v. 9). (2) The art of continuation. “For thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth.’ So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days” (1 Kings 17:14–15).

It is not what we see in hand but what we can touch in providence. A condition that is weak in sight may be full in providence. I may give my child so much today and reserve more for him tomorrow. What he has is but little and will not endure, but what I will daily dispense is more and will be enough to sustain him. Some Christians live more hand-to-mouth than others. God seems to deliver each day what allowance they need. Other Christians have an estate crowded with plentiful things all at once. There is little difference between the one and the other. Just as God has given a large provision for many days to the one, He provides daily provision for the other. What does it matter if I live by a successive eating of the food I have at home or by a fresh and successive supply from the market?

## CHAPTER 20

# *Overwhelming Afflictions: Part 1*

The fourth cause of anxiety is the strength of present afflictions. To overcome this, we must observe four particulars.

First, every affliction takes its commission from divine providence. It does not come by chance but by order and appointment. “For affliction does not come from the dust, nor does trouble spring from the ground” (Job 5:6). It is an arrow that comes from a high quiver. The blows that you feel are below, but the hand that strikes is above. All afflictions are messengers from the court of heaven.

The LORD’S voice cries to the city—  
Wisdom shall see Your name:  
“Hear the rod!  
Who has appointed it?” (Mic. 6:9)

Affliction is like a rod; elsewhere, it is called a scourge. But God appoints it. Not one lash befalls us but by His command. “If there is calamity in a city, will not

the LORD have done it?" (Amos 3:6). There is an evil of iniquity that people commit. It is a sinful evil in which God has no effecting hand. But there is also an evil of calamity, which is effected by God. This is a miserable evil in which God has an inflicting hand. Paul often tells us of a predestination to affliction (Rom. 8:29). He desires "that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this" (1 Thess. 3:3). Providence must necessarily have a hand in our afflictions, for we never meet them apart from God's appointment. Aware of this, Job declares, "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). If there were no other reason not to worry but this, this would be sufficient: God is the absolute Lord of life and death. He is the Lord of our mercies and our afflictions. Is it reasonable to ask Him what He does? David quiets himself, declaring, "I was mute, I did not open my mouth, because it was You who did it" (Ps. 39:9). It is the Lord, and David has no more to say. Likewise, we say, "I will bear the indignation of the LORD" (Mic. 7:9). It is not for me to mutter or murmur. I have deserved it, and God has brought it. It is my cross, and I must bear it. I must sit down quietly and thankfully under it.

Second, God's providence does not only command the existence of affliction but qualifies it so that it will be a mercy to His people. Affliction is like a sword that can both kill and lance. It is like a wind that can both sink

and propel. Whatever afflictions might be to evil people, they are always for the good of good men. Though medication is not good to the palate, it is good for the person. "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:11). "It is good for me that I have been afflicted," says David, "that I may learn Your statutes" (Ps. 119:71).

There are two kinds of affliction. The first is a natural affliction. It strips us of some comfortable good. It steps in between us and our earthly delights, to cut down our flower, to cloud our sun, to darken our day, to make a separation between us and our temporal comforts. For example, I delight in a child, and death snatches him away. I love a wife, and she is taken from me. I find comfort in a friend, and he is gathered to his last home. These kinds of afflictions are like Abimelech's servants who stopped the wells that Abraham's servants had dug. So, affliction stops those wells of consolation that our judgments and affections have discovered. They are like tides and waves that cover the shore and bereave us of our nearest joys and, so, are a heavy pain to us.

The second type of affliction is an infused affliction. In medication, there is the natural virtue of every ingredient, and there is the superadded virtue of the physician's skill compounding the ingredients. If each ingredient were given by itself, it would not do the patient any good

and perhaps even do him harm. But together, they drive the disease out of the person. Thus, God qualifies all afflictions for our good. When God blessed the waters of the Jordan, they cured Naaman of his leprosy. So, when God tempers our afflictions, they cure us of our sinful corruptions. "Therefore by this the iniquity of Jacob will be covered; and this is all the fruit of taking away his sin" (Isa. 27:9). You do not cast gold into the fire to consume it but purify it. Nor does God cast His people into affliction to destroy them but better them. "I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant" (Ezek. 20:37). You should kiss the rod that has caused you to draw near to God in sweet communion. The purpose of every affliction is to inform us, hinder us, turn us, cleanse us, or quicken us.

## CHAPTER 21

# *Overwhelming Afflictions: Part 2*

We are considering the fourth cause of anxiety—the strength of present afflictions. In the last chapter, we looked at two particulars. Here we will examine two more.

First, divine providence proportions all afflictions. It does so in one of three ways. (1) It suits affliction to the person's particular need. It serves as a kind of medication or treatment that directly and aptly hits a particular disease. If a person could open his heart, way, and condition, and then open the secret message of affliction, he would say, "Here is a disease, and there is the remedy." By prayer he can search to see the disposition of his soul in the kind and manner of his affliction. When God's Word comes in power to the conscience, it delivers the very frame of the heart to itself. Likewise, when affliction comes with a blessing, it reveals much of our circumstances—what is amiss and what is to be done. It reveals pride, carnal affection, negligence, hypocrisy, unfruitfulness, and disregard for God.

(2) Providence accommodates affliction to the person's strength. Affliction is sent by the hand of special providence, and therefore it is not rigorous. It is inflicted not according to the full demerit of the one who suffers but according to the merciful wisdom of Him who corrects. Elihu says, "For He need not further consider a man, that he should go before God in judgment" (Job 34:23). Paul says, "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13). If God brings a particular affliction, He will supply particular strength. God has a right in all our comforts, and He is a better good than that which is taken away. If He brings a sudden affliction, He will supply speedy patience. If He brings a strong affliction, He will grant a strong faith. Though the affliction is near, God will be near too. If the affliction is strong, His power will appear in weakness. A great affliction will have a great effect in the end and sufficient strength for the present. It will be sufficient so that we can bear it and to make a holy use of it.

(3) Providence moderates affliction through time. God says, "I will not contend forever" (Isa. 57:16). "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials" (1 Peter 1:6). Affliction comes when there is a need, and it abides no longer than is necessary. It is for a season. A season

is some agreeable portion of time. It is not a perpetual endurance but a convenient space.

Second, successive afflictions are a course of medication prescribed by a wise and faithful providence. Oftentimes, a single affliction does not help us understand, nor does it awaken us. Samuel, at the first call, did not know that it was the voice of God. A person is apt to lay the blame on some other factor, but when God repeats His strokes, when He charges afresh and enters with a deeper wound, now the heart startles because something is amiss. Oh, this pride must be left, this careless service must be reformed, and this filthiness, unprofitableness, or worldliness must be purged. God never multiplies crosses without special reasons. Therefore, we must not vex ourselves when crosses renew themselves. If the former cross had done all the work, a new one would not have been necessary. God has no delight in afflicting you, but He will repeat His strokes rather than let you lose your soul.

If we will not humble ourselves under small afflictions, we may expect greater ones. If the afflictions do not mend us, more afflictions will befall us. It is a wise and good providence that will give medication as long as necessary until the disease is cured.



## CHAPTER 22

### *Changing Circumstances*

The fifth cause of anxiety is the denial of a desired good that we have sought in lawful ways with a fair probability of receiving. Suddenly, it is turned upside down because of some hindrance. In such a case as this, we should not disquiet our hearts because providence has a hand in it. We must consider the following points.

First, visible prosperity is often withheld because we are inclined to ascribe the efficacy of our good to the means rather than God. Because of our corruption, probable means stand between God and His glory. For example, we think the church is safe and all will continue as is, for strength, wisdom, and success have been on our side. We are so prone to cast all the glory and applause on second agents while God, who has done all, is least in our thoughts. When means seem to comply with our designs and desires, and they fall in as rightly as we would have them, we do not usually look up to see the hand of providence thus working and forming them. Instead, we ascribe the main fruit to the strength of our

own devices or the mere power of the creature. Therefore, God withholds our desires from us lest we should withhold His glory from Him.

Second, when good is ready to be delivered by the probability of means, it oftentimes gets stuck. This affects us with the instability of the creatures. Though they look large and promise much, they suddenly fall away from us. They are like a ship floating toward a point. You think it would be good to cast anchor there, but the wind blows, and the ship slips by. The same is true of second causes. They are of a deluding nature. We think they will give us their help, comfort, and assistance. We are ready to seize them. And then, like flowers that we plan to pluck in the morning, they fade away. They are like a flock of birds, which we plan to catch with a net. They suddenly rise and fly away. The creatures are so mutable; hence, our expectations are so deceivable. No one can assure himself of a certain comfort from an uncertain help. We are often mocked by the vanity of preferences. We create so much assurance and contentment from the smiles of ordinary probabilities, but we discover that fair probabilities, though they excite great hopes in us, often slip away and leave us to great sorrow. They are like the Pharisees who talk much and do nothing. He is a wise Christian who enjoys good as though he would not have it, desires it as though he would not miss it, and expects it as though he may be denied it.

Third, God acquaints us with the insufficiency of all means. Though they make promises, they cannot perform any good without His permission. In a marriage there must not only be the consent of the young people but of their parents. It is so in the fruition of any good. The parent, the Father of lights, from whom descends every good gift, must consent (James 1:17). If He does not, the creature and the means are insufficient because they are not absolute in their ways.

Fourth, divine providence often interrupts probabilities to see whether we trust God in improbabilities. There is a double ground upon which a person may assume that God will do him good. The first is the serenity and ripening concurrence of apparent means and ways. When they all offer their service and further and finish a desired good, a person is persuaded that he will enjoy and take possession of it. He is confident that God will effect it, for he sees all the means on his side. The second ground is the fidelity, goodness, and virtue of God's promise. Though it is not so sensible a ground, it is a more certain ground, and it is the right and only ground of faith. God has promised that He will be my God, that He will be all-sufficient to me, that He will be my exceeding great reward, and that He will do me good. He has promised that if I acknowledge Him in all my ways, He will direct me, and that if I commit my ways to Him and delight in Him, He will bring it to pass. These are His promises. But improbabilities intrude. The means seem to turn

against the promises. I conclude that God may do this with the purpose of strengthening my faith by fixing it upon His promises so that I will not receive the good by sense but by faith. We must learn to cast ourselves upon God's good words and pursue our good, but all this must come from the generosity of God's gracious and faithful covenant. The mercy that tastes most sweet comes in the way of faith instead of the way of sense. The good that God delivers out of a promise to faith and prayer infinitely exceeds that which I fetch by the cunning of my own mind and effort. Probabilities often shrink so that faith has room to grow. It is a fine attitude to fear when things are probable and to trust when things are improbable. In the height of means, it is right to fear and to be low and submissive, knowing that God may check all. In an apparent lack of means, it is proper to be high and dependent, knowing that God is able to command all good to us. Providence may remove a good where the way seems open, and yet providence can put forth the good even when the way seems to be closed.

Fifth, the goodness of a thing is not always found when the means are fair but when providence is gracious. The greatness of desire and the fairness of second agents are not sure trials of a convenient state. What I do not have is not always good for me. It is only reputed to be good when it does not only give present contentment but future satisfaction. When it will prove to be good as well as seem to be good, it is good indeed.

Sixth, God's denial of a particular good often causes us to remove the sting that sin has put into the good that we desire. Perhaps there is some former sin or some present corruption that requires pardon and healing. If you desire to enjoy your good and your sin together, the evil of your sin will mar the sweetness of your good. Therefore, God interrupts your hopes so that He may bring your good as a mercy.



## CHAPTER 23

### *Distressing Cares*

The sixth case of anxiety is concern over the well-being of our posterity. We become anxious when we must leave our family in a destitute condition. But there is no reason to be so disquieted if we would look to the strength of God's providence. We must consider the following points.

First, providence never dies. "Behold, I am dying," said Jacob to Joseph, "but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers" (Gen. 48:21). Though you must die, God will never die. His care for His creatures is from everlasting to everlasting. We might not be able to leave any wealth to our children, but we can entrust them to God.

Second, providence is not restrained to an any age, person, or generation. God promises, "I will...be God to you and your descendants after you" (Gen. 17:7). Providence has expressed itself to children as well as parents, to orphans as well as others. "The helpless commits himself to You; You are the helper of the fatherless"

(Ps. 10:14). “A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation” (Ps. 68:5).

Do not remove the ancient landmark,  
Nor enter the fields of the fatherless;  
For their Redeemer is mighty;  
He will plead their cause against you.  
(Prov. 23:10–11)

Children may lose father and mother, but God will be their Father. If He meets your needs, He will do the same for your posterity. If God is a Father to you, and if He is a Father to your posterity, He will find a blessing for you and your children. “The generation of the upright will be blessed” (Ps. 112:2). “The children of Your servants will continue, and their descendants will be established before You” (Ps. 102:28).

God’s providence extends to children who are unable to provide for themselves. Moses was placed in the small boat before he was able to row or sail. He was only three months old. His mother placed him in a coffin, and she expected to see the river rise and the waves cover him as in his grave. But providence had its eye on him. Pharaoh’s daughter came down to wash herself at that precise time and place. She saw the basket and found the child. God gave such a piercing rhetoric to the tears of the baby that she was moved to compassion and became a diligent instrument of his preservation and upbringing (Ex. 2:3–10).

I will add another example. Hagar wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. The water was all gone, and her poor child was left under a shrub. She stepped away, unwilling to see the child's death, but providence stepped in. "God...heard the voice of the lad" (Gen. 21:17). The very cries of a poor child ascended to heaven. When God heard it, He sent Hagar to a well of water, and the child was preserved (v. 19).

The milk of providence is sweeter and surer than that of a nursing mother. David says, "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take care of me" (Ps. 27:10). By this, we understand that God will be a Father to him even though his father and mother cease to exist.

Parents should seek four things for their children: first, to make them God's children; second, to make them loyal citizens; third, to provide for them both for the present and the future; and fourth, to direct them to God's promise and providence. We should not be anxious about what great estate, mighty friends, or marvelous help we might leave to our children. We should be careful to make them children of God, and then we should prepare them for some particular calling by which they may give themselves in service to the church or state. We must not be remiss in our duty, for God will not be lacking in His providence. It is common to see the children of the rich waste a fair estate that their parents settled on them to perpetuate their names. And we may look at the

children of the poor, many of them orphans, and discover that they have mounted the highest steps of ecclesiastical dignity and have had the highest ensigns of civil honor carried before them. This is high evidence of providence.

Let parents take care that they themselves are good and let them take care to teach their children to be so, for their children's rise and safety depend upon the same sufficient and faithful hand of providence.

## CHAPTER 24

### *An Exercise in Futility*

Having explained these six causes of anxiety and having demonstrated the strength of providence to remove them, I will present some reasons why we should not trouble ourselves.

First, worrying about our conditions and circumstances is sinful. If contentment is good, then worrying must be bad. It springs from unbelief, pride, or both. A lack of faith produces troublesome thoughts, and these weigh us down. Those who will not trust God have decided to be a burden to themselves. If we will not submit to God's providence, then we must endure our own anxiety and distress. It is a great iniquity when a child dares to assume the authority of his father, and it is a greater iniquity when a person frets that he is not the disposer of his own condition. "Oh, that I were made judge in the land," said Absalom (2 Sam. 15:4). It is no different when we attempt to correct God for His providence or direct Him as to how He ought to bestow His hand.

Second, worrying does no good. "Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?" (Matt. 6:27). The prophet Habakkuk speaks of those who "weary themselves in vain" (Hab. 2:13). The same is true here. Anxiety over outward matters and circumstances is vain. When we have paced around and tossed thought upon thought and find that this will not be, we are still as we were. Circumstances do not flow from our thinking but from God's providence. Results do not come from our distress but from God's appointment. Let us break our hearts with troublesome musings if we will! They will only serve to add to our fears. They will not further our desires.

Third, worrying does much hurt. God sees that we are a grumbling people who will not be satisfied with His goodness, power, wisdom, and faithfulness. How justly may He curse our present blessings when we distrust Him for future mercies! Furthermore, worrying upsets all our spiritual duties. We are usually at a loss by reason of the multitude of unbelieving and vexing thoughts. Our hearts murmur and quarrel while our tongues say we do not know what. In our spiritual duties, we feel many just reproaches and a smiting upon our desire for great mercies. Why then will you not trust God for a bit of bread and a piece of clothing?

Fourth, we may have our needs supplied without all this worrying. "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we

wear?... For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt. 6:31–33). You do not need to keep up such a disturbance. You do not need to torment your thoughts with care, doubt, and suspicion. What would you have more than food, drink, and clothes? Your Father will not fail to give you those things. Do your work, seek first His kingdom, "and all these things shall be added to you." They will come by themselves as smaller matters into a greater bargain.

Fifth, worrying taints the good things we receive. What we receive while believing is sweet and comfortable, but what we receive while worrying loses its taste. We will not enjoy it until we have repented of our former disturbance. Those who are impatient until they receive a particular good are usually unthankful when they receive it, for those who do not know how to depend on God have yet to learn how to bless God. Nor can I expect a contentment of mind in the fruition of a particular good when there has been an unbelieving turbulence in the expectation. What comes when I am vexed is no mercy, and it will cost me many prayers and tears to make it so. When the Israelites desired to have a king, God gave one to them, but it was in wrath. It is a grief when we will force God (as it were) to give us things. We demand things without a blessing sealed upon them. When God answers not our needs but our desires, not our wants but

our pleasures, we usually find that such mercies prove to be hard crosses and troubles. And we scarce taste a delight before we break out into new complaints so that by our worrying we have procured to ourselves an additional burden.

## CHAPTER 25

# *Waiting on God*

When God delays or suspends the bestowal of any promised and suitable good, we must wait upon His providence. All our good lies in the hand of providence, but this hand often prevents us. Oftentimes, God pours good upon us as a cloud pours down rain upon the earth without warning. We feel our need, identify God's mercy, ask for it, and soon enjoy it. Yet many times God is pleased to delay. In this case, it is our duty to wait upon providence. Waiting upon God's providence is an unlimited submission of ourselves and our desires to the time of God's good pleasure with a continued expectation of the promised good.

First, it is an unlimited submission. Those who strive to be the author of their own good do not depend on God. Those who set their own timing do not wait upon God. We are to reason as follows: "If the Lord will continue to exercise my heart, body, estate, or children with afflictions, if He is not pleased to command my helps and deliverances, I will wait for His time. Since He withholds

the mercy which I desire, though He has promised to give it, I resign myself to His will. He is the Lord and may do what He will. He is my God, and my times are in His hand. If my sufferings are longer, my heart will be made better. If my mercies are delayed, my God will hear me in the end. As for the when, I leave it to Him.”

Second, it is a continued expectation. Those who wait at the door and knock have a continued expectation. If I knock and go away, then I do not wait.

And I will wait on the LORD,  
Who hides His face from the house of Jacob;  
And I will hope in Him. (Isa. 8:17)

Though God seems not to look, we will look. Though He seems not to hear, we will call. Patience is an important ingredient of waiting. When you would have a mercy from God, you must not be in haste, demanding that you receive it now or never. Nor should you be hasty with God. You must not be angry as if He were slow or backward. If He does not answer, you must sit down in quietness, renew your prayers, and listen until He speaks.

## CHAPTER 26

# *God's Timing*

Waiting concerns our blessings and deliverances, and therefore it is difficult to practice. However, it is very sweet and comfortable. So that we may better frame our spirits to waiting, I will speak of the power, wisdom, and way of providence concerning times and seasons.

First, our times belong to God's providence. David says, "My times are in Your hand" (Ps. 31:15). This includes times of sorrow and times of comfort. God's providence appoints times and seasons (Dan. 11:27, 29, 35). "The time..., yes, the set time, has come" (Ps. 102:13). "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven" (Eccl. 3:1). "The vision is yet for an appointed time" (Hab. 2:3). Moreover, God's providence changes the times. "And He changes the times and the seasons" (Dan. 2:21).

Second, God's providence is pleased to take time before it does us good. Though God has undertaken for us, though He has assured us of our supply, though He does intend to give us a mercy, He does not always

perform it immediately. There may be a space between His intention and His application. As He is the God of our mercies, so He is the Lord of our times. He often delays when He does not intend to deny. The Israelites' deliverance from Egypt did not occur in a single moment. Divine providence was the hand that brought them forth, but they languished in the house of bondage for many years. David was promised a kingdom, but he had to wait for it. He was not immediately rescued from his troubles. Though Paul was confident that God would deliver him, he despaired of his life because God delayed so long (2 Cor. 1:8–9).

Third, God's providence will find a time to do us good. Though God does take time, He will not waste time. He will be mindful of His covenant. He will not forget the cry of the poor.

For the vision is yet for an appointed time;  
But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie.  
Though it tarries, wait for it;  
Because it will surely come,  
It will not tarry. (Hab. 2:3)

As providence is a hand that is full of blessing, so it is a hand that is sure and certain. The sun has a time when it disappears, but it also has a time when it rises and shows itself again. Though God seems to neglect us in the way and vigor of His providence, He has a time to answer all our prayers and to fulfill all our necessities.

Why do you say, O Jacob,  
 And speak, O Israel:  
 "My way is hidden from the LORD,  
 And my just claim is passed over by my God?"  
 (Isa. 40:27)

In other words, the Lord laments that the Israelites think that He will never do good, that their enemies will triumph over them forever. They think that, because they have solicited His help and He has not granted it, He has purposed to withhold it forever. But what do the following verses say?

Have you not known?  
 Have you not heard?  
 The everlasting God, the LORD,  
 The Creator of the ends of the earth,  
 Neither faints nor is weary.  
 His understanding is unsearchable.  
 He gives power to the weak,  
 And to those who have no might He  
     increases strength.  
 Even the youths shall faint and be weary,  
 And the young men shall utterly fall,  
 But those who wait on the LORD  
 Shall renew their strength;  
 They shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
 They shall run and not be weary,  
 They shall walk and not faint.  
 (Isa. 40:28–31)

Hence, the Lord gives this promise: "You will know that I am the LORD, for they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me" (Isa. 49:23). When a man looks and looks and nothing comes of it, he is ashamed for being so disappointed. But God promises, "I will not disappoint you. I will not fail you. You will never be ashamed. No one will mock you, saying, 'This is your God in whom you put such confidence! What will He do for you? He has done nothing!'"

There are two reasons why God will surely find a time to do us good. (1) The power of His faithfulness. Truth is the seal of His goodness, and God cannot be unfaithful. "It is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18). (2) The honor of His name. If He should not keep truth, if He should promise help, comfort, and mercy, commanding us to look to Him yet never providing, His honor would be under a cloud. Who would think well of Him, trust Him, or speak of His goodness?

## CHAPTER 27

### *The Best Time*

The timing of God's providence is always the best. There is a good that God has promised and I have desired. The only difference between the two is the timing. I would have my time, and God will have His time. I will receive the good in His time, not mine. To aid us in this, we must consider these two points.

First, God's timing for bestowing His mercies is best. Though a mercy will never come too late, it might come too soon. Just as every good is not fit for every person, so every time is not fit for the enjoyment of every good. There are various fruits on the trees in autumn. But if you gather them all at once, you will find a heap of rottenness instead of a storehouse of plenty. It is the seasonable gathering that makes them endure. Those who hasten God's mercy will thereby lose it, but those who can wait for God's timing will enjoy His mercy with sweetness. Our desires are many times but violent moods, but God's gifts are always wise. As He gives liberally, so He orders His gifts with discretion. Though

He waits long, His answer is always perfectly timed. A mercy comes at a time when it proves to be a mercy in all respects, not only when it is a thing suited to my desire but advantageous to my person and condition. It does not prejudice any good that I have or I want, yet it notably suits my needs. If it had come sooner, I would not have been ready. If it had waited longer, I would have been damaged. If it had come when I prescribed it, it would have been wasted, but coming right now when God appoints it, I am preserved. "In an acceptable time I have heard You, and in the day of salvation I have helped You" (Isa. 49:8). David had his kingdom at such a time that made for his quiet and safety.

Second, just as God's timing is best for the receiving of any outward good, so it is best for the removing of any outward evil. A bandage is not to be removed until the wound is healed. The sick man may say that now is the time to go abroad, but the physician may limit him for a longer period of time, knowing that, though he feels strong, he is not fit to travel. God removes the affliction only after it has accomplished its end. And when we are indeed purified in this fire, then it is time to be removed. Many people would have returned to their former sins if they had not been held back by longer afflictions. There is a marvelous wisdom in divine providence in discerning suitable mercies and seasonable times.

## CHAPTER 28

### *Intentional Delays*

The delays of God's providence are not denials but preparations. If God takes time to answer, it is for the ripening of your mercy. God's delay of our mercies allows for numerous things.

First, it produces intimate discoveries of the heart. A person's corrupt heart will show itself at such a time. When the fire is put under the pot, it causes the scum to rise to the surface. It is hard to imagine the amount of pride, quarreling, murmuring, anger, and impatience that is in a person's heart. Impatience reveals itself in the heart because it laments that it cannot immediately have what it chiefly desires and expects. We tend toward unbelief, thinking that God will forget us because He does not answer us at once. What an absurdity to run after the creature! What imbecility of spirit that we are so ready to sink and faint! If a person were to take a view of his soul at such a time, he would see such sinful corruption as calls for sorrow and reformation all the days of his life. When God does not immediately help, such a person falls into despair. "Why

will God not help me?" Here we see his pride. "When will God help me?" Here we see his impatience. "I will look for other help." Here we see his unfaithfulness. "It is vain to seek God for help." Here we see murmuring.

Second, God's delay occasions an inward humbling of the spirit. The tender soul may search for the reason for God's delay in its own former or present dispositions. What am I? What have I done that the Lord puts me off from day to day? Have I put off the directions of His Word in the same manner? Have I neglected the motions of His Spirit? Have I delayed in the same way that He now delays in answering me? Perhaps, when humbled, the soul will discern some special corruption, and that will be God's time to send the mercy desired.

Third, God's delay produces steadfast seeking. It multiplies prayer and makes it flow with strength. God delights in supplication, and any mercy we receive from God by the forcibleness of prayer tastes more like a mercy and it sticks close to us. "For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked of Him," declares Hannah (1 Sam. 1:27).

Fourth, God's delay produces contented submission. By delaying His mercies, God works two mercies at the same time. First, He eventually bestows the good we crave. Second, He wins over our hearts to His will and pleasure. The pride of our hearts quarrels with God for His slowness. But now it stoops and comes before the Lord, saying, "Lord, let it be as You will. I am willing

to abound, and I am content to wait. If You bring it to pass, I will bless You. If not, I desire to submit to You.” We must remember that some crossings of our desires will cause our trust to rise up to God. Some delays will increase our submission and waiting upon His will. This is ordinary. God will satisfy our will when we have risen so far as to submit to His. When I am able to deny myself, God will not easily deny my request. Those who stay until God is pleased to speak are those who will fare best. We are never fit to enjoy God’s answer if we are too hasty to resist His timing.

Fifth, God’s delay often doubles the mercy. Some trees are slow in bearing fruit, but when they do, it is with an abounding recompense for their former fruitlessness. We shorten our mercy many times by hastening it. “Instead of your shame you shall have double honor” (Isa. 61:7). For your waiting you will seldom be answered with a single mercy. God recompenses us for both our prayers and our patience. Abraham waited a long time for a son, but when Isaac came, he was a choice child. “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 22:18). Joseph wanted to be delivered out of prison when he interpreted the butler’s dream, but God’s delay produced not a bare deliverance, but an honorable deliverance. He was not only taken from prison but raised up to be a prince in Egypt. A person who is sick desires a speedy recovery, but God often makes him feel His hand for a long time, and eventually He gives him a double health—one for his body and

another for his soul. Who would not wait for God, knowing that His delay is but the treasure of more mercy for us?

What more can I say to stir up your hearts to wait on divine providence? The promises are a spring full of water from which waiting souls derive abundant mercy. A good Christian is in such a happy condition. Either he has enough in hand, or else, if the good is delayed, it lies sure for him in the promises.

For since the beginning of the world  
Men have not heard nor perceived by the ear,  
Nor has the eye seen any God besides You,  
Who acts for the one who waits for Him.

(Isa. 64:4)

“Blessed are all those who wait for Him” (Isa. 30:18). God’s promises have surely opened themselves to those who have waited.

Behold, this is our God;  
We have waited for Him, and He will save us.  
This is the LORD;  
We have waited for Him;  
We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.

(Isa. 25:9)

Your God waits to be gracious to you. He watches for the most fit time for the best good, and He will certainly perform it. By impatience, you may hinder your own good and trouble your own soul. But the best way to reap is to wait until the harvest, until that season comes.

## CHAPTER 29

# *Learning Contentment*

If God's providence extends to all things, and if it is a wise ordering, preserving, and sustaining of all things, then we must learn to be content with our present portions and conditions. People engage in two great quarrels: one with God and one with their conditions. Those who are displeased with God will never like their conditions. They say, "Who can live upon such means? Our portion is not enough. We desire more honor, ease, riches, or friends. We are as good as others, we need these things as much as others, and we would probably use them better than others." As a result, they fret away their days in envying other people's conditions or in complaining about their own lack. Any condition seems better and bigger than what they have. To remedy this distemper and to frame the heart to be more content, we must consider the following.

First, providence gives every man his portion.

Behold, this is our God;

We have waited for Him, and He will save us.

This is the LORD;  
We have waited for Him;  
We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.  
(Isa. 25:9)

“The LORD makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up” (1 Sam. 2:7). One person is in a great estate and another in a low estate. One has more, and another has less. Both portions are from God. Our conditions are not measured out by the strength of our prudence or the virtue of our diligence but by the effectual direction and blessing of providence. The master gives more to one servant than another. The father gives a larger inheritance to one child than another. We are all the servants and children of the great God who is our Master and Father. We do not fall into our conditions by chance but by the providential dispensation of a wise God. Whatever you have, whether it is more or less, it is due to God’s providence. He gives being to all creatures, and He bestows a certain allowance to sustain and support them.

Second, our present condition, which comes by God’s providence, is enough. When we say something is enough, there are two possible meanings. (1) It is enough when it is all that we are able to desire. (2) It is enough when it is all that we need to desire. Our condition is enough if we need not desire more. “And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content” (1 Tim. 6:8). There are desires of indulgence and desires of convenience. God’s providence does not dispense enough to such desires. The

father gives enough to the child to meet his needs, but he gives him nothing at all to gratify his folly. We must distinguish between that which is given to us and that which is abused by us. Many people are cast into nothing, and they have nothing at all. It is not that providence gave them no estate but that they, like the prodigal, wasted it in riotousness and indulgence. No estate will be enough to those who trade in immoral luxury or sit still in lazy idleness.

Third, every person's present portion, given by divine providence, is best. Since the fall of Adam, everyone is sick. The best diet for those who are sick is not what their diseased appetite craves but what their wise physician prescribes. God is wise, and all excellence of condition depends upon a wise goodness. There is a double estate that may befall us. The first is that of possessions: riches and lands. The second is that of relationships: spouse and children. Do I abound in possessions, or do I lack? Do I have plenty, or do I have little? Each condition is best for the one who is in that condition. Do I eat? That is best. Do I fast? That is best. Do I labor? That is best. Do I relax to restore my health? That is best.

The best is what is most suitable, not what is the biggest. When you buy shoes for your child, you do not purchase the largest size because it would not fit him. It is not the best for him, though it is the largest. The condition that is suitable to me, which I can wear with most usefulness to God, is best. The degree of good does not consist in size but in suitability. Someone might say,

“Oh, that I had greater means!” But the truth is that a person who can walk in his cloak might stumble in a long gown. Those who can serve God in a moderate estate might trip in an abundant condition. A plain coat will keep the child warm while the laced coat may make him proud and cold. It is a difficult thing to bear every estate. A person does not know the secret weakness of his own heart. It is difficult in a limited estate to be quiet, and it is difficult in a high estate to be humble. Greatness of estate is a strong inducement to pride. Is it not better to row in a narrow river where the boat is able to deal with the gentle current than to thrust into the wide sea where every wave may sink it? Some lack is good to make us remember God. Many people who have experienced a great fullness have forgotten their God and quickly lost their souls.

Concerning personal relationships, God’s providence is eminent in this condition as well. Sometimes it brings together a good husband and a good wife, sometimes a foolish Nabal and a wise Abigail, sometimes a proud husband and a humble wife. It may seem strange that God should link such contrary persons into the deepest society of union. Many people complain of this as their burden, and they sinfully desire to be rid of it. But all this is best. I do not mean that any sinfulness in a husband or wife is naturally good but that God disposes these contrary natures for good. The poor qualities of either married party may cause more humility, more prayer, and more circumspection in the other.

## CHAPTER 30

### *Using Lawful Means*

If God's providence is full of power to dispose, alter, help, and support, full of wisdom to hit the peculiar seasons of all suitable good for us, and full of truth and faithfulness to deliver what is good to us, then let us be advised to apply ourselves to the ways of God's providence. Jacob said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?... Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt" (Gen. 42:1–2). So, I ask the same question. Why do we stand in idle contemplation of our necessities? Why do we content ourselves with complaining about our needs? We have heard that there is sufficiency in divine providence.

There are some things that God alone does, and there is no human concurrence in them. Such are the works of creation and redemption, which are entire and absolute. God alone is in them, but there are other things for which God expects and requires action from us. For example, though God has undertaken all our supplies and comforts, we must work. We must not lie in the ditch and think that crying "God help me" is enough.

Though providence blesses us, we must serve providence. Though all our helps are from providence, we must put forth ourselves to the ways by which the same providence will do us good. Though there is a spring of water, we must be wise and carry our vessels to it.

Because this is a point of much consequence, let me prescribe some directions for the application of ourselves to those ways by which we may find divine providence to be blessed and comfortable to us.

For starters, if we desire to enjoy the good of providence, we must use the means provided. Jacob received a promise that God would go with him in his journey and that He would return him to his father's house. Yet, upon returning, he hears of Esau's armed men. And so, he goes to God in prayer and wrestles with Him all night. Then, he gives some attention to the means by which he might secure his passage. He sends presents to his brother to soften his rough spirit and to ingratiate himself to him. He arranges in order his cattle, possessions, and relations. And God blessed these means for his peace and comfort. Another example of this is found in 1 Chronicles 19:12–13, "Then he said, 'If the Syrians are too strong for me, then you shall help me; but if the people of Ammon are too strong for you, then I will help you. Be of good courage, and let us be strong for our people and for the cities of our God. And may the LORD do what is good in his sight.'"

We must indeed entrust ourselves to God, but it must be through His appointed means. If a person is

sick, he must not think to himself, "I have poured out my prayer to God who is able to heal me," and then just lie in his bed waiting for God to heal him. He must know that God's hand is the fountain, but the physician's hand is the instrument. Though a prophet assures Hezekiah that he will recover, he listens to the physician's counsel. "Let them take a lump of figs, and apply it as a poultice on the boil, and he shall recover" (Isa. 38:21).

This is true in spiritual matters as well as temporal matters. We must not separate what God has joined together. We must not separate the end from the means. If a person expects mercy, he must repent and believe. If he expects grace, he must pray for it. Those who do not sow will not reap. Too much confidence in the means may cause us to look to them as the absolute and principal commanders of our good. This is very contemptible. Yet, without using the means, we seldom obtain the good that we seek.

There are occasions when no means appear. At such times, God gathers up all our good into His promises, and the whole endeavor of the soul must be taken up with faith and prayer. When the conduits are stopped or cut off, we must make our way to the spring itself. Similarly, when God cuts off all means, we should say with Jehoshaphat, "Our eyes are upon You" (2 Chron. 20:12). We must cast ourselves entirely on God, as did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us" (Dan. 3:17).



## CHAPTER 31

### *Avoiding Unlawful Means*

As observed in the last chapter, if we desire to find the good of providence, we must use lawful means. There are two sorts of means. (1) Some are indirect: they are devised by the temptation of Satan, the haste of unbelief, or the strength of greediness. (2) Some are direct: they are appointed by God and are such as His word will warrant. "This is the way, walk in it" (Isa. 30:21). When we see God going before us, we may safely follow. If we have His Word to warrant the means, we may expect His goodness to bless and prosper. Related to this, it is important to observe several things.

First, God does not appoint sinful means. Evil ways are not the pipes that God's providence has established. They are the work of our own corruption. God is good, and He promises good. He brings our good through good means. All His ways and methods are answerable to His nature, which is goodness itself and the rule of goodness. He will not have us do any evil that good may come of it.

Second, God does not prosper or bless evil means. When Israel applies itself to Egypt and Assyria, God rejected their confidence, and they did not prosper (Jer. 2:36–37). He “will arise against the house of evildoers, and against the help of those who work iniquity” (Isa. 31:2). When people use unlawful means, God denies them the good that they seek or He turns the good that they receive into a curse. Saul resorts to the witch at Endor to consult his own safety against the army of the Philistines, but he had a message that broke his spirit and then a sword that ended his life. Ahab is sick for Naboth’s vineyard, but he cannot get it by purchase and trade. Therefore, he will have it by false witness and murder. But then, the prophet meets him. “Thus says the LORD: ‘Have you murdered, and also taken possession?...In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours’” (1 Kings 21:19). Gehazi harbors covetousness in his heart, and he will take what his master has refused. He longs for a talent of silver and two changes of clothing, which causes him to lie. “Indeed, just now two young men of the sons of the prophets have come to me from the mountains of Ephraim” (2 Kings 5:22). Well, he gets the silver and the clothing and with them leprosy, which cleaves to him and his descendants forever (v. 27).

All unlawful means are enclosed with curses. Unjust gains are like sand—clasp a handful of it, and it slips away. Though we bring it home, God will blow it away

(Hag. 1:9). He will blast and shrivel it as the hot wind shrivels the fruitful plants. For those who defraud their laborers, the money that they withhold will cry out against them as a witness. "Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire" (James 5:3). Through lying, extortion, bribery, and fraud, people accumulate treasures of gold, but being treasures of wickedness, they will be cursed with ruin and confusion.

As a partridge that broods but does not hatch,  
So is he who gets riches, but not by right;  
It will leave him in the midst of his days,  
And at his end he will be a fool.

(Jer. 17:11)

Solomon says, "He who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished" (Prov. 28:20).

Third, God's ways are the only ways of blessing and enjoyment. When you see God's prohibition, you cannot expect His blessing. But when the way begins with God's command and ends with God's promise, it is always hopeful. In all lawful means, God stands at the entrance with His precepts and at the conclusion with His rewards. "Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness" (Ps. 37:3). If God has sealed the means by His Word, though they seem to be unprofitable in the eyes of others, you will have the good that you desire or, at the least, you will have the

comfort that comes from knowing that you did not put forth your hand to iniquity to procure your comfort.

God promised David a kingdom, but at that time Saul possessed it, and he sought David's life. On more than one occasion, however, Saul fell into David's hand. Yet David declared, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD" (1 Sam. 24:6). In these words, David acknowledges that God had promised him the kingdom, but He has not permitted him to take it by any means. Finally, David is brought in a righteous and obedient way to enjoy the crown and to rule over the kingdom.

"In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Prov. 3:6). The means that we wickedly take are sometimes quicker, but they are surely dangerous. But the means that God appoints, though they may sometimes be slow, they are surely comfortable.

## CHAPTER 32

# *Walking Uprightly*

If we desire to see the good of God's providence, our hearts must be upright. "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless" (Gen. 17:1). The Lord is saying to Abraham, "I am Infinite Goodness, and I am able to do any good for you. I can give you any required blessing, and I can keep you from any hurtful evil. I can remove any uncomfortable cross. And I will do all this if you will walk uprightly before me." Consider the words of Job 22:21–28 and Isaiah 33:15–16. You will find that God's providence spreads itself for the upright. "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him" (2 Chron. 16:9). There is strength for the upright (Prov. 10:29). There is gladness (Ps. 97:11). There is light amid darkness (Ps. 112:4). There is a sure dwelling (Ps. 140:13; Prov. 2:21). Every good thing is for them (Ps. 84:11).

If a person has a crooked and hypocritical heart, he has a divided heart. His heart is not sincere and plain

before the Lord. He does not love God or bestow himself entirely to God, but he merely observes Him for his own ends. He makes a division in God, that He must tolerate such a lewdness or wickedness, and then he will be for Him in any other command. Such a heart is full of flaws and rottenness. It is half for God and half for some worldly or fleshly lust. He abandons God in the insincerity of his affections.

How just is it for God to deny His gracious power, His gracious protection, His gracious comfort, and His gracious help to such a person and to abandon him in the blessings of providence? How can you expect God's hand if you will not give Him your heart? Why should He bless you when you make all His blessings to serve against Him? If you are not a faithful servant, what reason do you have to think that He will be a good Master to you? If you desire God to be for you, then find yourself to be for God. The righteous will be blessed and not forsaken. The land of uprightness is watered with the showers of heaven. No good heart has found God otherwise than a good God, but as the hypocrite has a flaw in his heart, so he has a moth in his estate. Though he has some rejoicing, it will be short-lived, for God will not lay out Himself for him who lays out himself for sin.

## CHAPTER 33

### *Exercising Faith*

If we desire to experience the good of God's providence, then we must get and exercise faith. Faith is the eye that sees our good and the hand into which God delivers it. You know that the covenant of grace is a banner of mercy displayed. There is not a kind of good or a degree of good that is not included in it. Faith is the arm that carries this banner. It is the great grace of the covenant to which God has promised to dispense all our mercies. All the promises look toward faith, as the faces of the cherubim looked toward the mercy seat. When Abraham entreated God for Ishmael, "Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!" God answered, "Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with Isaac" (Gen. 17:18, 20–21). Though God may cast many good things upon evil people because they are His creatures, He reserves His special graces and sweet mercies for believers.

There is no better or surer way to enjoy our good than to trust God for it.

But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD;  
He is their strength in the time of trouble.  
And the LORD shall help them and deliver them;  
He shall deliver them from the wicked,  
And save them,  
Because they trust in Him. (Ps. 37:39–40)

It is easy to demonstrate to you the compliance of providence in all respects unto faith.

First, providence removes and hinders evils. Faith finds deliverance. “Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted, and You delivered them” (Ps. 22:4). It is because of faith that God’s providence hinders evil attempts. Hezekiah trusted in the Lord his God, and the Lord hindered Sennacherib’s enterprise and turned him back to his home.

Second, providence keeps and preserves. Whether you consider the safety of our persons or our sustaining by food and clothing, faith finds that providence is good for it. There is no better way to secure our persons than to commit them to God. Every believer may say with Jacob, “God... has fed me all my life long to this day” (Gen. 48:15).

Third, providence promises God’s presence. “For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Heb. 13:5). This is a promise for those who have faith.

Do you desire to have any good from God? Then, “Believe in the LORD your God, and you shall be established” (2 Chron. 20:20). If you desire a blessing, you must have faith. Go to the Lord, and say, “Oh, Lord, You have said that You would do me good. Your Word has caused me to apply my heart only to You. You are the all-sufficient God, full of goodness and truth. I desire You. For Your truth’s sake, perform and remember the word upon which You have caused me to hope. Be the God of my mercies and comforts. Oh, Lord, I am not able to command the least blessing to myself, but my eyes are toward You. I rest on You to be my God, my portion, my help, my stay, my deliverance, my comfort, my good that You have promised and that I now crave.”

Do this by faith. Put the Lord to it; show Him His own hand. Let Him know that He has undertaken for you, that you are His, and that you rest in Him alone. Say, “Oh, Lord, where should a child go but to his father? Where should a believer go but to his God? If a man promises another man that he will perform his command, even if it is to his loss, it is his honor to be faithful. Now, You are truth itself. You have promised and cannot lie. Lord, is not this the word that You have said? Have You not promised every good thing—and this in particular? And You know I need it. I desire it that I might serve You better. I take You at Your word. I commend my case to Your good mercy, and I will rest on Your wisdom

and faithfulness. I beseech You, for Your covenant's sake, to bless me."

Our strength and salvation will be found in this rest and quiet. There is no other way like this to get God to open His hand and work for us. Unbelief shuts up heaven, but faith opens it. God will not do good to those who make Him a liar. But if we can by faith give glory to God, it will be a name of joy and praise to Him to do us any good assuredly.

## CHAPTER 34

# *Working Diligently*

If we desire to experience the good of providence, we must be diligent in our callings. The bread of idleness is neither sweet nor sure. “An idle person will suffer hunger” (Prov. 19:15). Even Adam in the state of innocence was to dress the garden. And now it is imposed on all to eat our bread by the sweat of our brow. In an army, the general appoints every soldier to his proper place and service. Likewise, God has designed all people to different vocations. These diverse callings preserve society and sustain the individual. The assignment of our particular callings is from God’s providence. “But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk” (1 Cor. 7:17).

As God has delegated our particular callings, so He has enjoined industry in them. When a craftsman arranges the variety of wheels—one greater and one lesser, one above and one below—the composition serves for motion. So, the several forms of our callings are to be managed with action and labor. We are to walk in our

callings (1 Cor. 7:17), and we are to work in our callings (Eph. 4:28). "Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread" (2 Thess. 3:12).

God has promised many blessings to those who are industrious and diligent in their callings. "The hand of the diligent makes rich" (Prov. 10:4). "The soul of the diligent shall be made rich" (Prov. 13:4). "The hand of the diligent will rule" (Prov. 12:24). "The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty" (Prov. 21:5). But God has threatened shame and poverty to those who are idle. He has not promised the idle person a piece of bread, and He has commanded us to give him nothing. "We commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" (2 Thess. 3:10).

If we expect any good from God's providence, we must be diligent in the duties of our callings. You must not say, "Well, God is all-sufficient. His providence is ample and active. I have nothing, and I will do nothing. God will take care of me; therefore, I will sit, sleep, lay, or beg, and so I will live." No! An idle life and a believing heart are far away from each other. To live by faith is to live upon God's promises, but idleness is that which causes God to forsake our bodies and the devil to possess our souls. No one has less means to preserve the body and more temptations to infect the soul than an idle person.

Some people object, saying that they are unable to work. Are they then debarred from all good from divine

providence? We need to acknowledge that there are several sorts of disabilities. (1) Some are natural. Old age, for example, may devour our strength and leave scarcely sufficient energy to maintain our life. For those who have once labored but now cannot, providence stirs up pity and the bowels of charitable compassion to relieve and support them. Providence now provides their table and lodging in the houses, hearts, and hands of the able and merciful. (2) Some are accidental. The instruments of labor may be taken away by some accident. The soldier in the war loses his arm, hand, or leg. He can only look upon what he should do, but he is not able to do what he desires. In this case, providence again has commanded arms of help to those who are otherwise helpless. (3) Some are voluntary. Some people are sound in body but lazy in spirit. They are able but unwilling. Such people live unprofitably and eat of the fruit of the diligent. God has provided the magistrate to relieve such people with a rod of correction and house of labor.

Other people object, saying that they cannot find work. In this case, we must consider two questions. (1) Did you remove yourself from employment? You had it but rejected it. Any service is too much to an evil and idle person. (2) Did you work with one hand and overwork with the other? Was there a false finger in your work? It is rare to find a thievish nature and a pilfering hand far removed from a lazy, idle, and slothful disposition.

Well then, you must be working if you expect God to work. Do not thrust yourselves out of the way of His providence. Return to your shop, your needle, and your labor if you desire to be fed and clothed. If your heart is honest, your hands earnest, your desires moderate, and your soul believing, God will water your labors with His blessed providence. You will have sufficiency, though not grandeur. Enough will be your portion all your days.

## CHAPTER 35

# *Suffering Quietly*

If there is a providence that wisely disposes all things, then it may teach us to quiet ourselves under all the injuries that light upon us in this life. David was once in a great strait when his own son turned traitor and pursued him. That which might add bitterness to his sorrow was this—that Shimei barked against him and railed at him: “Shimei said thus when he cursed: ‘Come out! Come out! You bloodthirsty man, you rogue!’” (2 Sam. 16:7). How does David take this? He responds, “So let him curse, because the LORD has said to him, ‘Curse David.’ Who then shall say, ‘Why have you done so?’” (v. 10). In like manner we should incline our hearts to steadfastness when the waves of injurious tongues crash themselves against us. We should have an eye to God’s providence in them, for they could not befall us without the permission of providence. If any person withholds his favor from us, if he bestirs himself in our disgrace, if he seeks our hurt and prejudice, though the person is sinning, yet we are to look higher than the stone that is thrown. We are to have

an eye to heaven. God has many lessons for us, even in injuries and reproaches.

First, He teaches us to be compassionate toward wicked people and to pray for those who revile and injure us. Second, God arms us against those evils that the wicked unjustly cast upon us. If we are not as they say, we might have been so; therefore, we are to bless God who has withheld us and to pray that He will keep us. In this way, we must work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Third, God frames us to much holy circumspection. Soldiers are always in the best and strictest part of military discipline when the enemy surrounds them with their weapons. The eye that God has on us should be the principal reason of a circumspect conversation, but the eye of our enemies on us may also be a good occasion for us to be watchful.

## CHAPTER 36

### *Eternal Comfort*

I will now conclude my discussion of the doctrine of providence with an application of comfort and duty to God's people. In this chapter, let us consider our comfort. There is a special providence actively and effectually working in a special way for the good of the church. This is a rock for the church on which it may rest itself in all the difficulties of its militant condition. Augustine says there are two parts to the church. "One is in faith, and another is in vision. One is traveling, and the other is lodging. One is in labor, and the other is at rest. One is in the way, and the other is in the country."

Now, we must not speak of the church that is above all adversity but of the church that is exposed to affliction. We do not speak of the church that is perfectly victorious but of the church that is continually agonizing and combatting. We do not speak of the church that rejoices above all temptation but of the church that is afflicted in all trials. This militant part of the church, though it is as gold, is in the fire. Though it is built like

a rock, many waves beat against it. Though it is as the ark of Noah, built and preserved by a special hand of heaven, it is moving upon a tumultuous deluge of trouble. It is true that all people are, by reason of sin, capable of many calamities in this life. But the church, by reason of its goodness, is exposed to a sharper edge of malice, reproach, persecution, and hardship. Holiness and integrity, which should be its guard and defense as well as its honor and glory, occasionally prove to be the reason and mark of all opposition and contempt.

The church is so deeply assaulted and oppressed that many people suspect the reality or efficacy of God's special providence. They see obvious confusions and neglects of providence, especially that God, who is so good and gracious, should allow His church to be so assailed with miserable evils. Furthermore, this is the church that God has said that He affectionately loves. It may cause us to wonder that God, who is just, would leave His church to the cruelty and injustice of its enemies, and that God, who is omnipotent, would not by force of hand rescue the people of His covenant out of the claws of those who hate His name and attempt to ruin His servants.

Though the church seems to be neglected, we must look upon it with a spiritual eye and behold the admirable love and care of divine providence. It is most calm, sweet, safe, and happy. So that you may quiet your hearts in this truth, I will show you six comforts that the militant church may confidently draw from God's providence.

## CHAPTER 37

### *Gods Purpose*

The first comfort that the church may take from God's providence concerns its purpose and counsel. Divine providence has decreed and purposed all calamities for the good of the church.

First, nothing befalls us but what God has decreed and determined, as nothing befell Christ but what God had before ordained. "No one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this" (1 Thess. 3:3).

Second, all is decreed for good, as in Joseph's case, David's case, and Paul's case. "All things work together for good to those who love God" (Rom. 8:28). They are not devastations and destructions but benefits and advantages. The enemies of the church intend one thing, but God determines another. Though wicked people design ruin and destruction that the name of God may be forgotten, God decrees good by all opposition to His people.

The gold is never purer than when it is in the fire. The wheat is never cleaner than when it is in the wind.

The water is never clearer than when it runs among the stones and rocks. The sheep never stay together so orderly in their pasture than when the wolves are prowling around them. The musical instrument never sounds so sweet than when you strike it with your fingers. It is the same with the church: the times of its calamity are the times of its beauty. Our hearts are never more humbled, our ways are never more reformed and purified, our graces and heavenly opportunities are never more improved, our fellowship is never more kindled, and our prayers and dependencies are never more doubled and quickened than when the bondage of Pharaoh, the threats of Herod, or the rod of the wicked rests on the backs of the righteous.

If wicked people tear our bodies, God will preserve our souls. If they deform our beauty, God will reform our hearts. If they waste our estates, God will make up our comforts. If they take away our lives, God will give us heaven. There is no calamity which befalls the church that will not be a medicine to heal, a lash to quicken, or a trial to discover. It will be an advantage to the gospel, an enlargement of the kingdom, and a step to glory.

## CHAPTER 38

### *God's Power*

The second comfort is the power of divine providence. It is an almighty hand. Even in its most calamitous straits, the church is held in this hand. They are stars held in Christ's right hand (Rev. 2:1). Consider the content of Isaiah 41:8–10 and 51:12–16. The apostle Paul says, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). By this, he means that no one can be against us in final and total victory. When Joshua was at Jericho, "He lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, 'Are You for us or for our adversaries?' So He said, 'No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come'" (Josh. 5:13–14).

God's Word tells us that the power of God is a fort, tower, stronghold, and defense. It is an almighty arm or valiant hand that laid the foundations of the earth and spread out the heavens. At the shaking of His arm the nations tremble, and the people fall down in fear. No one can harden himself against God's power. He does

whatever He wills. Oh, when you hear all this, do you not say, "This is a good shield and a safe protection"?

For whom is this power? Is it for the church or its adversaries? The arm of His power is stretched out and brandished for the good of His church and for the confusion of its enemies. The prophet said to the distressed in his day,

Do not say, "A conspiracy,"  
Concerning all that this people call a conspiracy,  
Nor be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.  
The LORD of hosts, Him you shall hallow;  
Let Him be your fear,  
And let Him be your dread.  
He will be as a sanctuary,  
But a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense  
To both the houses of Israel,  
As a trap and a snare to the inhabitants  
of Jerusalem. (Isa. 8:12–14)

Though there is a conspiracy, a multitude of enemies joined in malice and power, do not fear! There is a greater power on the church's side. Our God is stronger than all.

But let me break this down into some particulars. The power of providence does many things for the church. First, it bridles all the power of its enemies. All those who oppose the church have a will but do not have power. They have a malicious will of their own but no power of their own. They can do neither good nor evil. As they have no power but what is given to them,

so they are unable to exercise any power above God's pleasure. The dog may snarl, but it cannot bite further than its chain reaches. God's providence has a power that is a chain cast over the malice of the wicked. It restrains their wrath.

Both riches and honor come from You,  
And You reign over all.  
In Your hand is power and might;  
In Your hand it is to make great  
And to give strength to all. (1 Chron. 29:12)

We are deceived if we exalt and fear the strength that evil people assume to themselves, especially when they say that the church is weak. If all the demons in hell should present themselves in their legions, and if every wicked person should join forces with them, and if they should rage against one poor and weak member of Christ, they would not be able to touch the smallest hair of his head unless God grants it. "When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD will lift up a standard against him" (Isa. 59:19). They may intend evil, but they will not act. They may rage, but they will not accomplish. They may threaten, but they will not execute. They may show themselves to be wicked people, but God will laugh them to scorn, dash their counsels, annihilate their strength, and withhold their arm. All their malice is under His command, and all their power is under His control.

Second, God's providence confounds all the power of the church's enemies. When they plot and consult, when they think that they will prosper, when they achieve some part of their design, when they applaud their villainous insolence, when they think to break the heart of the church with unbearable rigors, then the power of providence arises, disappoints, and rescues. It takes the prey from the teeth of the lion. When Pharaoh contrived to extinguish Israel, God quenched his rage in the depths of the sea, and He delivered His people. When Sennacherib exalted himself against the weakness of Hezekiah, God fetched him home, and his own sons killed him. When the Moabites allied with the Ammonites and those of Mount Seir against Judah, God turned their weapons against them, and they became their own executioners. When Julian the Apostate vowed to make a sacrifice of all the surviving Christians, God struck him with an arrow. When Eugenius the Tyrant fought against the armies of the Christians under Theodosius, God gave the very winds a power to take the weapons out of the enemy's hand. How easy it is for God to overthrow His church's enemies! How easy it is for Him to cut off the prime conspirator. Even Gideon with three hundred men or David with a stone can conquer. "No weapon formed against you shall prosper" (Isa. 54:17).

Third, God's providence is able to give to the church its intended good, even by the malice of its enemies. Joseph is sold by his brothers to be a slave, but by divine

providence he becomes a prince. Haman intends to ruin Mordecai, but in the end, he is forced to hold the stirrup for him and become the herald of his honor. The Pharisees and scribes never desist until they have killed Christ. But, in so doing, they occasion the greatest happiness in the history of the church.

Fourth, God's providence is able to prosper the church, even under all the oppression of its enemies. Pharaoh sets taskmasters over the Israelites to afflict them with their burdens (Ex. 1:11–12). But the more they afflict them, the more they multiply. The church may prosper in the midst of all opposition. Even when the enemies rage, God says, "Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion" (Ps. 2:6).

Fifth, God's providence can give strength to His church to suffer and power to conquer all its enemies. "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37). We read that the dragon made war with the saints, yet "they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death" (Rev. 12:11). It is certain that God is able to stop the wicked so that they will not employ their malice. If they do, He can deny them occasion. And if they lay hands on us, He can yet deliver us. Even if the wicked kill us, they will never conquer us, for grace knows no death, and the church will abide forever. Not even the gates of hell will prevail against it.



## CHAPTER 39

### *God's Truth and Wisdom*

The fourth comfort to the church concerns the wisdom of providence. It consists of these six things: (1) discerning what is good for the church, (2) foreseeing all the evils that will befall the church, (3) disappointing the evils that He chooses, (4) ordering the evils that He permits, (5) devising means of safety, and (6) supplying strength or deliverance in due season.

What a comfort is this! The church must deal with strong enemies, yet it has a more powerful God. The church must deal with malicious and cruel enemies, but it has a most tender and affectionate God. The church must deal with subtle enemies, but it has a wise and understanding God against whom there is no wisdom or counsel, for He is able to snare "the wicked...in the work of his own hands" (Ps. 9:16). It is true that the enemies of the church are subtle and malicious. They are not only the generation of the dragon but also the seed of the serpent. They are called foxes for their wiles. Hence, we read in Scripture of their traps, nets, devices, and snares.

They are cunning in covering their rotten hearts and intentions. Mischief, falsehood, and death are in their thoughts, but God is wiser than they are. He takes the wicked in their own devices and encloses them in their own net. He often causes them to fall into the very pit that they had dug for others. He sees all their plots, He blows upon their plans, and He finds ways to rescue and deliver His people.

The fifth comfort comes from the truth of providence. We all know that God has undertaken great matters for His people. You cannot imagine the particular case and exigency where providence will not intervene for the church. Now "He who promised is faithful" (Heb. 10:23). Though you may see the church like a tree cut down even to its roots so that its enemies scorn it as an outcast and as one forsaken, though it may be brought to that sensible perishing as Ezekiel's dead dry bones, yet God will breathe upon it, and it will live in His sight. He will gather again His elect and cause them to take root downward and to bring forth fruit upward. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform it. "And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed" (Josh. 23:14). You will never know the time or day when enemies will attempt to make an utter end of the church, but God will be directing in some part of

it, strengthening in another part, comforting in another, and delivering in another, restraining and confounding the enemies of His church.



## CHAPTER 40

# *God's Tenderness and Faithfulness*

The sixth comfort to the church is the tenderness of providence. We read that God relates to His church in familial ways. He relates to His church as a father to his firstborn (Jer. 31:9), as a mother to her nursing child (Isa. 49:15), as a shepherd to his flock (Jer. 31:10), and as a friend to his familiar acquaintance (Song 5:16). The Lord is compassionate toward His distressed and afflicted people (Ex. 2:23–25; 3:7–10).

In all their affliction He was afflicted,  
And the Angel of His Presence saved them;  
In His love and in His pity He redeemed them;  
And He bore them and carried them  
All the days of old. (Isa. 63:9)

What a comfort it is to the church that the almighty God is its most gracious and tender Father! His particular thoughts and affections are yearning toward His church. He is sensitive and compassionate toward His people. How can it be ill with the church while its

God has enough power to help it and enough love to bestow it?

The seventh and final comfort is the faithfulness of divine providence. It has an eye open for the church.

He who keeps you will not slumber.  
Behold, He who keeps Israel  
Shall neither slumber nor sleep. (Ps. 121:3–4)

“The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore” (v. 8). Consider the content of Isaiah 42:14–16 and 51:7–8. Providence has worked until now, and it still works. (1) The same God works, (2) the same church continues, (3) the same covenant continues, and (4) great instances of God’s providence at work still abound. God would have to deny His own oath and seal if He were to utterly leave His church. He has entered into an everlasting covenant with it.

Now, put all these notions together. May not the church of God take heart? It has a God who is the author of all good, who decrees nothing but good to it. The church has an almighty power exercising itself for it, most tender affections toward it, wisdom to foresee, divert, defeat, and supply, faithfulness to bind Himself to all this, and certainty that He will never leave nor forsake it.

As the mountains surround Jerusalem,  
So the LORD surrounds His people  
From this time forth and forever. (Ps. 125:2)

What more could we wish for the church than good? And what more could we desire for its safety than a singular love, an infinite power, an exalted wisdom, and an everlasting faithfulness to act and perform all this? Therefore, let us not forget the Lord our Maker, who "stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth." Nor let us fear "the fury of the oppressor, when he has prepared to destroy." For "where is the fury of the oppressor?" (Isa. 51:13).



## CHAPTER 41

### *Our Duties*

When enemies attack, the church seems to be desolate and oppressed, and it looks like God does not go forth on our behalf, we must consider the following duties.

First, we must reform ourselves. Israel fled before the men of Ai because she had sinned. God's people feel the smart of the rod if they trespass against Him. It is not that His hand is shortened and that He cannot save but that our sins separate us from Him. In all the church's calamities, let us not accuse God of a lack of affection but ourselves of a lack of obedience. Let us not accuse Him of a lack of justice but ourselves of a lack of repentance. Let us not accuse Him of a lack of power but ourselves of a lack of care.

Oh, that My people would listen to Me,  
That Israel would walk in My ways!  
I would soon subdue their enemies,  
And turn My hand against their adversaries.

The haters of the LORD would pretend  
    submission to Him,  
But their fate would endure forever. (Ps. 81:13–15)

Oftentimes the church, like our bodies, may contract vile and dangerous illnesses. Therefore, we should not marvel if God opens a vein, even by the sword of the enemy, to let out the rank blood. If the ministry is condemned, the Sabbath is despised, swearing becomes common, drunkenness spreads over all sorts of people so that there remains scarcely anything more than a formal profession of religion, we may say that divine providence is just in permitting enemies to afflict His people. If they see from where they have fallen and repent, then assuredly they will find the Lord to be merciful to them. For this cause, God often allows His own children to be shaken and oppressed. This is so they might, through their calamities, reform what they would not do in the days of their peace and security. We learn lessons in affliction that we ignore in prosperity. It was not until the thief was on the cross that he thought of a heavenly kingdom.

Second, we must seek the Lord with fervent and humble prayer.

Oh, that You would rend the heavens!  
That You would come down!  
That the mountains might shake at Your presence.  
(Isa. 64:1)

Consider the content of Isaiah 62:6–12; 63:15–19; 64:6–12. There is no better way to appease God than with true repentance. There is no surer weapon to overthrow the enemy than with faithful and earnest prayer.

Third, we must trust in God and depend upon His providence for ourselves and His church. To quicken us to this duty, we should think about these motivations. (1) We are commanded to trust in God, “casting all [our] care upon Him, for He cares for [us]” (1 Peter 5:7). We are encouraged to “cast [our] burden on the LORD” (Ps. 55:22), and to “commit [our] souls to Him in doing good” (1 Peter 4:19).

Commit your way to the LORD,  
Trust also in Him,  
And He shall bring it to pass. (Ps. 37:5)

Notice that each one of these exhortations has a singular encouragement annexed to it. (2) God will undertake for His people. He orders all things after the counsel of His will, whether you will trust Him or not. (3) There is no one to whom God is so much engaged as to His church. He is engaged by the affections of a gracious and eternal love; by the relations of a Father, Husband, and King; and by the obligations of an everlasting covenant. If He were to deny His vigilant care over His people who are in covenant with Him, He would need to deny Himself. (4) There is no one for whom He has done as much as His church. He has not done so for any nation. He is a

God who performs great wonders against all the fury of oppressors. (5) God has never failed His church. He has left large testimonies of His providence in their lowest, poorest, and most hopeless conditions.

Thus, we may comfortably depend upon God's providence, though the church's time is ever so troublesome, though the church is brought ever so low, though the deliverance of the church delays ever so long, though the helps of the church on earth are ever so few, though the calamities of the church are ever so great.