

Does God Work Only in and Through the Word?
“My Father works even until now, and I work” (John 5:17)

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This paper is a brief review of Chapter 13: The “Only In And Through The Word” Bunch in *The Christian and Idolatry*.¹ Brother Turner has done a good job of reviewing and critiquing several erroneous views circulating among brethren today. When brethren fight legitimate errors, they often run to an extreme and create other errors. Some of the “sham Gods of orthodoxy” addressed in Allan’s book, in my judgment, have been created by gravitating toward an extreme position. We must remember that truth often lies between two erroneous extremes. For example, brethren have often correctly addressed and answered the error of Pentecostalism (modern-day speaking in tongues, miracles, Holy Spirit baptism, etc.), but they have created another error at the same time; namely, that God works only in and through the word (the Bible).

Two Separate Issues

The doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is briefly mentioned by Allan in Chapter 13. He states that some brethren believe that the Holy Spirit dwells in the Christian as his word dwells in the Christian, and thus, God works only in and through his word. Allan then cites an example of this belief from the pen of Wayne Wells on page 183. Indeed, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a basic Bible truth and the *manner* in which the Holy Spirit dwells (whether *literally* or *representatively* through his word) has been discussed for decades among brethren.² However, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit

¹ *The Christian and Idolatry*, Allan Turner, Allanita Press, 2006.

² Some brethren believe in the *literal* indwelling and others believe the Holy Spirit dwells in them *representatively* through his word. I hold to the latter; however, the doctrine of the indwelling will not be discussed in this paper because it does not fall under the scope of my assignment. Further, I am not willing to divide over the *manner* in which the Holy Spirit dwells in the Christian unless one’s position on this matter advocates an error that is opposed to the clear teaching of scripture. Those interested in further study on this subject should consult the following works. For the *literal* indwelling position see: *The Holy Spirit and the Christian* by James D. Bales; *The Finger of God* by Ferrell Jenkins; *The Spirit and Spirituality* by J.D. Thomas; *The Holy Spirit* by Garth Black; *God’s Indwelling Spirit* by F. Furman Kearly; *The Holy Spirit* by Elmer L’Roy; *Is the Holy Spirit for Me?* by Harvey Floyd; and *The Holy Spirit: A Biblical Study* by Jack Cottrell. For the *representative* indwelling position see: *The Indwelling of Deity* by Maurice W. Lusk III; *The Indwelling and Influence of the Holy Spirit* by Jerry Moffitt; *The Holy Spirit: His Indwelling and Work* by Howard Winters; and *The Holy Spirit: His Nature and His Work* by James

is one issue and the providence of God is another issue. The one (indwelling) does not define the other (providence). These issues are separate.³ To say that the Holy Spirit dwells in us as his word dwells in us, does not lead to the conclusion that God works only in and through his word. This is a non-sequitur (meaning, “it does not follow”). It does not follow that God works today only in and through his word when the Holy Spirit dwells in us through his word.

God Works in and Through His Word

It is true that God works only in and through the word if we are speaking of God’s revealed will for mankind today (special revelation). God speaks to us today only in and through the revealed will of his Son (Hebrews 1:1-2) and that revealed will is complete and final (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:4; Jude 3).⁴ There are no latter-day revelations from God to mankind through direct or providential means. Also, God most certainly works through his word. God’s revealed will to mankind is powerful (Romans 1:16), working (1 Thessalonians 2:13), living and active (Hebrews 4:12) in those who believe it and obey it. However, God’s work today is not confined to his word only. He works in others ways through providence.⁵

P. Needham; *A Biblical Study of the Holy Spirit* by Richard E. Black; *The Mission and Medium of the Holy Spirit* by Foy E. Wallace, Jr.; *The Work of the Holy Spirit* by Franklin Camp; and *The Holy Spirit* by Franklin Puckett.

³ Some brethren would disagree with this statement. They believe the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit is very much a part of God’s direct providential care for the Christian. For example, Mac Deaver, who circulates among some institutional Churches of Christ, “teaches something he calls **providence internal**, which is his direct operation on the heart of the saint, separate and apart from God’s word ... Additionally, brother Deaver alleges that when a brother denies the direction operation of God in providence today he is a deist who stifles, weakens, cripples, and kills the church...” (Daniel Denham, “Does God’s Providence Necessitate a Direct Operation?” in *Defender*, Vol. 38, No. 2, Feb. 2009). Mac Deaver sets for his case in his book, *The Holy Spirit: Center of Controversy – Basis of Unity* (Biblical Notes Publications, 2007). Deaver’s position has been critiqued by Daniel Denham in *Profiles in Apostasy #2* (Gospel Light Publications, 2011). Another advocate of this position is Terry Rush who sets for his case in his book, *The Holy Spirit Makes No Earthly Sense* (Howard Book House, 1987). Rush’s position has been critiqued by David P. Brown in *Profiles in Apostasy #2* (Gospel Light Publishing Co., 2011).

⁴ For a good study of the complete and final revelation of God see *The Finality of the Faith* by James D. Bales (Lambert Book House, 1972).

⁵ There are many Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, and systematic theologies in print today that cover the subject of providence, but they are too numerous to list here. One recent work that covers the subject of providence from an evangelical perspective is *Four Views on Divine Providence* edited by Stanely N. Gundry and Dennis W. Jowers (Zondervan, 2011). One participant in this *Four Views* book is Ron Highfield who associates with institutional brethren and is a professor at Pepperdine University. For a good introduction to the study of providence, I

God Works Outside of His Word

We serve a God who is alive and active today, not absent from his creation, and we must avoid erroneous extremes with respect to his work.⁶ Of course, we must avoid atheism (no God and no intervention; the only “god” is deified nature or “Mother Nature”). But, in our belief of God we must also avoid certain man-made alternatives to providence such as indeterminism (there is a God, but he has no control over anything),⁷ self-determinism (there is a God, but he does not have any overruling power to control autonomous man),⁸ and determinism (there is a God who controls everything with unconditional predestination including man’s free-will and moral responsibility).⁹ The

recommend the following books and articles written from the perspective of those associated with the Restoration Movement: “The Providence of God” by Robert C. Hampton in *The Living and Abiding Word: 1979 Freed-Hardeman College Lectures* (Williams Printing, 1979); “A Study of Providence” by Terry Green in *Gospel Anchor* (Volume 4:8 through Volume 5:7); “A Study of the Providence of God” by Wayne Jackson in *Difficult Texts of the Old Testament Explained* (Winkler Publications Inc., 1982); *The Providence of God: The 1989 Power Lectures*, Thomas B. Warren and Garland Elkins, Editors (Southaven, 1989); *What the Bible Says About God the Ruler* by Jack Cottrell (College Press, 1989); *Prayer and Providence* by Homer Hailey (Religious Supply Inc., 1993); “The Providence of God: An Outline Study” by Keith Sharp in *Faith and Facts* (April 1997); “The Providence of God” by Michael Hatcher in *God the Father* (Sain Publications, 2003); *The Providence of God* by Gene Tope (Guardian of Truth Foundation, 2010); *Unseen Hand: Father and Son View Providence* by Robert C. Hampton and Gary C. Hampton (Publishing Designs, Inc., 2003).

⁶ Some believe in the providence of God but limit his providential activity to works of nature only, history only, major matters only, occasional acts of good fortune, or salvation matters only; see Cottrell, pages 23-28; and Warren and Elkins, pages 68-80.

⁷ Examples of indeterminism can be found in the philosophies of chance, Epicurianism, and evolutionism; see Cottrell, pages 31-40.

⁸ Examples of self-determinism can be found in the philosophies of humanism, occultism, and deism; see Cottrell, pages 40-49; and Warren and Elkins, pages 59-67.

⁹ Examples of determinism can be found in the philosophies of naturalistic determinism (fate, astrology, mechanism, Marxism, behaviorism), pantheistic determinism (Stoicism, Karma, Spinozism), and theistic determinism (Leibnitz, Islam, absolute foreordination or Calvinism); see Cottrell, pages 49-87. “A very rigorous doctrine of providence (like the one taught by Calvin) seems to lead to a determinism in which the divine will had laid down in advance the detailed course of history and which would therefore allow no space for free human decisions. Calvin states bluntly that ‘all men and angels do nothing, except at the secret instigation of God,’ though he also wishes to maintain (inconsistently, it would seem) that these agents are responsible for their actions. But whereas Calvin seems to think that even the most trivial events are directly decreed by God, many theologians would be content with a much less strict doctrine of providence” (John R. McRay, “Providence” in *The Dictionary of Bible and Religion*, William H. Gentz, Editor, Abingdon, 1986, page 851). A modern example of this type of determined

Biblical view of providence recognizes that God, in addition to working through his word, works providentially in the on-going world today outside (beyond) his revealed word in the Bible.

There are many activities of God that are performed by him outside (beyond) his revealed word. We call this providence.¹⁰ "Providence," from the Latin *providentia*, means "foresight" (literally, to look ahead, to see before, to foresee).¹¹ God's providence is God's active foresight, sovereign rule, support, supervision, and timely care of *all* his creation and in *all* areas of life. God plans ahead of time with a definite purpose in mind to care for someone or something in his creation. God's foresight can be seen especially in those things that he has planned even *before* the creation of the world (Ephesians 2:4; 3:11; 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Peter 1:19-20). God supports, cares for, and supervises *all* his creation.¹²

A good summary of God's providence is found in Nehemiah 9:6-8 where God is described as one who creates, preserves, promises, and fulfills. Each characteristic of God complements the other. What God creates, he preserves, and what God promises, he fulfills. Because God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent (Psalm 139), he acts providentially over all his creation. Because God is also able and willing (Ephesians 3:20), he acts providentially. The providence of God is a function of God's sovereignty.¹³

providence is found in the writings of C.S. Lewis (see Terry Green "A Study of Providence," *Gospel Anchor*, Vol. 4, No. 8, page 15).

¹⁰ The word "providence" is used in connection with God outside scripture in *The Wisdom of Solomon* 14:3 and 17:2. However, the word "providence" is not directly connected to God in Scripture, but the concept of providence is found everywhere from Genesis to Revelation. The Greek word *pronoia* meaning "foresight," "care," or "provision," is used of man in Acts 24:2 and Romans 13:14. The Greek word *pronoieo* meaning "to think beforehand," "take care," or "provide for," is used in of man in Romans 12:17; 2 Corinthians 8:21; and 1 Timothy 5:8. There are other Greek words that relate to the idea of providing for a thing by forethought: *hetoimazo* (Luke 12:20); *ktaomai* (Matthew 10:9); *paristemi* (Acts 23:24); and *problepo* (Hebrews 11:40).

¹¹ The foreknowledge of God is very much a part of God's providence, but foreknowledge will not be discussed in this paper; see Cottrell, pages 331-352.

¹² Terry Green concludes his study on this subject with a list of over 500 scriptures dealing with providence and a large bibliography (*Gospel Anchor*, 5:7).

¹³ A complete study of God's sovereignty is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is the crux of understanding much about providence. It is the Calvinist's understanding of sovereignty that leads many to believe in a deterministic form of providence. The Bible teaches that God indeed is sovereign and works providentially, but he does so without determining man's actions unconditionally and against his free-will. God is still sovereign and God still acts providentially even though he allows man free-will; see Cottrell, pages 265-298. The subjects of the will of God

God is King over all; thus, he controls all and cares for all. The Psalmist wrote: “*The earth is Jehovah’s and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein*” (Psalm 24:1). We must remember that there is “*one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all*” (Ephesians 4:6).¹⁴

A study of the providence of God is typically divided into “general providence” (God’s care for and control over his creation)¹⁵ and “special providence” (God’s care for and control over individuals to bring about the special divine purpose of salvation).¹⁶ It is important to understand a few principles involved in the general operation of God’s providence before examining some specific examples of providence.

First, God never providentially operates in a way that is contrary to his divine nature. For example, God is holy and righteous (Isaiah 6:3; Psalm 89:14) and so he would never providentially act in a way that would tempt people to do evil (James 1:13-14) or to act contrary to his revealed will. Since God acts providentially according to his divine character, he will never act whimsically, capriciously, or arbitrarily.

Second, God’s providence does not violate or negate man’s free-will and so he will never providentially coerce someone to do either good or evil (Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Matthew 23:37; John 5:39-40; Revelation 22:17).¹⁷

Third, God may use natural means or supernatural means to accomplish his providential care. The same divine supernatural power which brought our universe into existence can still continue to govern and preserve it. I know of no characteristic of God’s personality or principle of scripture that is violated by God using supernatural means in his providence today. Whether his supernatural means should be called “miraculous” or not is debated by brethren. I certainly would not be contentious about this point and I remain open to further study about it.¹⁸

and predestination must also be taken into account when examining the subject of providence; see Cottrell pages 299-352.

¹⁴ All scripture quotations are taken from the *American Standard Version* (Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1901).

¹⁵ See Cottrell, pages 89-115.

¹⁶ See Cottrell, pages 117-159; and Warren and Elkins, pages 33-58, 229-235, 410-448.

¹⁷ See Cottrell, pages 161-228; Green, 4:10, pages 25-27; and Warren and Elkins, pages 249-258..

¹⁸ Turner addresses this point briefly on pages 185-186 of *The Christian & Idolatry*. However, it should be noted that Christians are divided on this point. Some brethren believe that God does not use miraculous means in his providence; only natural law (see Cottrell, pages 261-263; Green, 4:9, pages 20-23; Jackson, page 86; Hatcher, page 306; Warren and Elkins, page 324 and

Finally, God works in his providence behind the scenes. Like Joseph's brothers, we are acting out our lives, but God is acting as well behind the scenes with other purposes in mind (Genesis 45:4). Cyrus acted for Israel's good though he did not know what God was doing for them (Isaiah 45:5). Mordecai remarked to Esther: "*who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*" (Esther 4:14). Paul wrote to Philemon: "*For perhaps he was therefore parted from thee for a season, that thou shouldest have him forever...*" (Philemon 15). We know that God providentially works in our lives because the Bible says so, but we cannot be dogmatic in our precise identification of such providential happenings in our lives (the exact time, means, methods, and manner of God's providence).¹⁹ We must remember that there are some secret things that God has not revealed (Deuteronomy 29:29) and there are some things about God's wisdom and knowledge that we simply do not know (Romans 11:33-34). As such, we do not need to advocate one particular model to describe how God's works in his providence (Ecclesiastes 11:1-8). Having reviewed some of the basic principles of providence, let us now turn our attention to some of the many activities of God's providential care under four headings:

1. God's Control Over His Physical Creation. God has control over his animate creation such as the animals (Job 12:7-10; 38:39 – 41:34; Psa. 36:6; 50:11; 104:21,27-28; 145:15-16; 147:8-9; Matthew 6:26; 10:29; Luke 12:6). God's providential preservation is seen in that if he were to take away the breath of animals, they would die and return to the dust (Psalm 104:29). God also has control over his inanimate creation such as the earth, the heavens, and the weather (Jer. 5:22; 10:13; Job 36:24-33; 37:2-15; 38:4-38; Psalm 29:1-11; 65:1-13; 74:12-17; 93:1-5,24,31-34; 104:1ff; 135:6-7; 147:1-20; 148:1-14). He controls the seasons (Genesis 8:22; Psalm 104:19), the rain (Psalm 147:8), the sun and stars (Job 9:7), the ice (Job 37:10), and the snow (Psalm 147:16-18).

God controls the casting of lots (Proverbs 16:33) and the physical development of the human body (Psalm 139:13-16). God makes "*his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust*" (Matthew 5:45). God does "*clothe the*

page 364). They speak of God "manipulating" natural law or "intervening" in natural law. Some, like Terry Green, say that a "supernatural source" (God) is at work today in providence, but not a "supernatural means" (miracles) (Green, 4:9, page 20). Some brethren speak of providence as a "supernatural, non-miraculous" power. The main argument that most brethren make against miracles is that a miracle is a "sign" that points to a spiritual lesson, and God would not use miracles in providence because no one would be able to see the "sign" behind the scenes in providence. Other brethren believe that God uses miraculous means in his providence (see Tope, page 42; and Sharp, page 51).

¹⁹ "The mystery of providence is the 'modus operandi' of it. To understand and give reason for all the minutiae of life's events would require that we be God ourselves! To be able to interpret each single event in life as God does would make providence no providence at all! There are some things which we are to fully understand later (Jn. 13:7)" (Bill Reeves, "Divine Providence," Thayer Street Lectures, page 6).

grass of the field" (Matthew 6:30). Paul said to the citizens of Lystra: "And yet he left not himself without witness, in that he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17). In Jesus, as God's Son, "all things consist" (Colossians 1:17; that is, hold together). Jesus, as the very image of God, is "upholding all things by the word of his power" (Hebrews 1:3). God is the "glue" that holds the universe together. However, one day, God through his providence, will bring this world to an end with his word (2 Peter 3:7,10,12).

God's creation and continued providential control over it proclaims his wisdom, power, glory, and goodness so that mankind is without excuse in knowing God (Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:19-20).²⁰ It is God's providential control over his creation that is a guarantee to us that God will fulfill his gracious promises to mankind also (Jeremiah 33:19-22). Indeed, "This is my Father's world," as we sing in our song book, and "He's got the whole world in his hands."²¹

So then, what should our response be to God's providential care over his physical creation? We should have a sense of awe, reverence, and humility before the Lord. The Psalmist wrote: *When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, The moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?* (Psalm 8:3-4). Elihu advised Job: "Stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God" (Job 37:14). Our response should be like that of Job, who, after hearing from God directly about his control over the world, said, "Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer thee?" (Job 40:3) and "I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of thine can be restrained" (Job 42:2).²² Knowing that one day God will destroy his world with his word, we must repent, obey the gospel, and live righteously (2 Peter 3:9,11).

2. God's Battle with the Devil. John wrote: "And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels going forth to war with the dragon; and the dragon warred and his angels; And they prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast down, the old serpent, he that is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world; he was cast down to the earth, and his angels were cast down with him" (Revelation 12:7-9).

So then, what should our response be to God's providential rule over the Devil and his hosts of wickedness? We can have confidence that God will answer our prayer to be delivered from the Devil (Matthew 6:11,13) and provide a way of escape in times of temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13). But, if we want to do the Devil's bidding and give

²⁰ For a detailed study of how Romans 1 and 2 relate to the subject of providence see Terry Green, *Gospel Anchor*, 5:1 and 5:2.

²¹ For further study on this point see Warren and Elkins, pages 465-480.

²² For further study on Job and providence see Warren and Elkins, pages 449-464.

heed to the *“doctrines of demons”* (1 Timothy 4:1), he will blind us (2 Corinthians 4:4) and deceive us (2 Corinthians 11:13-14). God will then send us a working of error to those who love not the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12). On the other hand, we know that we can stand against the wiles of the Devil if we put on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18). The Devil is very much alive and working in our world today, but we can withstand him in our faith (1 Peter 5:8). We also respond in confidence knowing the God is in control even over the Devil. Paul wrote: *“And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly”* (Romans 16:20). Like the great multitude in heaven who understood that God was victorious over the Devil, we can shout, *“Hallelujah, for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns...”* (Rev. 19:6; see Revelation 20:3,10).

3. God’s Rule Over the Nations. God is *“the ruler over the nations”* (Psalm 22:28), he *“reigneth over the nations”* (Psalm 47:8), and *“his eyes observe the nations”* (Psalm 66:7). *“The king’s heart is in the hand of Jehovah as the watercourses: He turneth it whithersoever he will”* (Proverbs 21:1). God *“removeth kings and setteth up kings”* (Daniel 2:21) and he *“ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever he will”* (Daniel 4:17,25,32; 5:21). God worked in the hearts of the Egyptian pharaoh (Exodus 9:16), the Assyrian king (Isaiah 10:5-12; Hosea 7:12), the Babylonian king (Isaiah 10:24-26; Jeremiah 4:6-13; 25:9,15-26; 27:5; 50:18; 51:7,20; Ezekiel 29:1-21; Habakkuk 1:5-6), the Medo-Persian king (Isaiah 13:1-3; 44:28; 45:1-13; Jeremiah 51:11), the Greek king (Daniel 8:20-21), the Roman kings (Daniel 2; 7), and the Jewish authorities (John 11:49-52; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; 13:27) to accomplish his purposes for Israel. God brought down the Jewish nation in A.D. 70 and cared for *“the elect”* while he did it (Matthew 24:22).²³ Civil government is *“ordained of God”* and it acts as a *“minister of God”* when carrying out punishment against the evildoer (Romans 13:1-7).

So then, what should be our response to God’s providential care over the nations? Like Ezra, we should bless God for his work in the hearts of national leaders when their leadership benefits us (Ezra 6:22; 7:27). We should continue to *“live by faith”* in God even though the nations around us are proud (Habakkuk 2:4). We should also continue to pray that God will work in the hearts of national leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-2), in the hearts of our enemies (Matthew 5:43-44), and that he will avenge our enemies (Revelation 6:6-9; 8:3-5). We should have confidence in time of national trouble remembering that Jesus Christ rules over all the nations (Psalm 2; 45; 110). He is *“King of kings”* (Psalm 17:14; 19:16).

4. God’s Care for His Children. God has demonstrated his providential care over many individuals in the Bible and he continues to care for you and me. David wrote: *“I have been young, and now am old; Yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his*

²³ For other examples of how God providentially worked among the nations see Terry Green, *Gospel Anchor*, 5:3 and 5:4; and Warren and Elkins, pages 149-162, 336-351. For a detail study of this particular area of providence see *God Among the Nations* by Edward C. Wharton (Sunset School of Preaching, n.d.).

seed begging bread" (Psalm 37:25).²⁴ We must remember Paul's words in Athens: *"for in him we live, and move, and have our very being..."* (Acts 17:28). Jesus reminded his disciples: *"the very hairs of your head are numbered"* (Matthew 10:30; Luke 12:7).

Examples of God's providential care for his children are numerous in scripture.²⁵ He cared for the Jews (Exodus 34:23; Leviticus 25:20-21; Deuteronomy 8:3-4), Joseph (Genesis 39:2-3; 45:5; 50:20), the Jews returning from captivity (Ezra 6:22; 7:27), Jesus (Matthew 4:11; Luke 22:43), Paul (Acts 27:23-24; compare with Romans 1:9-10; 15:30-32; see also 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 and 2 Timothy 4:17), Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:27), and many others.

Today, God provides for our physical necessities (Matthew 6:23-33; James 4:3; 5:16).²⁶ God is on the side of the faithful Christian as he walks through life (Romans 8:28-39).²⁷ God provides for our every spiritual need (Ephesians 1:7,18; 3:8) and physical need (Philippians 4:19). He gives us every good and perfect gift from heaven (James 1:17). God sends messengers (angels) to serve us (Hebrews 1:14). God offers help in time of need when we pray to him (Hebrews 2; 4; 13:4-5). God sends chastening to correct us (Hebrews 12:5-13; see also Job 33:13; 37:11ff). God will protect us, deliver us, and rescue us from evil (2 Timothy 4:18; 2 Peter 2:9).²⁸ Remember, God is Jehovah-Jireh, or "the Lord who sees and will provide" (Genesis 22:14).

God answers our prayers when we ask according to his will. (Matthew 6:6,9; 7:7-11; Ephesians 3:15; Philippians 4:6; 1 Peter 3:12; 1 John 5:14-15) and he responds (Numbers 14:19-20; Luke 18:7-8; Ephesians 3:20; James 4:2; 5:16-18; Revelation 8:3-5).²⁹ He answers our prayers for daily bread (Matthew 6:11), for his will to be done (Romans 1:10; 15:32; James 4:14-17), for our troubles (Philippians 4:6-7),³⁰ for open

²⁴ Many of the Psalms deal with the providential care of God for his children: 37, 44, 66, 78, 85, 91, 103, 104, 105, 135, and 139. A number of Psalms deal specifically with God's providential protection of his children: 4:8; 18:2; 23:4; 31:3,4,14,15,20,23; 34:15,19; 37:39-40; 41:1-2; 68:20; 121:1-8; 145:20.

²⁵ For more examples see Warren and Elkins, pages 81-136, 163-228, 236-248, 378-395, 449-464.

²⁶ See Warren and Elkins, pages 396-402.

²⁷ We must be careful to keep this passage in its context and not apply it to every providential activity of God as is often done by brethren. For more on this passage as it relates to providence see Warren and Elkins, pages 482-492

²⁸ See Warren and Elkins, pages 352-362.

²⁹ See Cottrell, pages 353-78; and Green, 4:11, pages 8-15.

³⁰ See Warren and Elkins, pages 276-286.

doors to preach the gospel (Philippians 1:12-14; Colossians 4:2-3), for protection from adversaries (Romans 15:30-31; 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2), for national leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-2), for wisdom (James 1:5-6), for sickness (James 5:13-18), for health (3 John 2), and for vengeance (Revelation 6:9-11; 8:3-5). By his providential will, *“we shall both live and do this or that”* (James 4:15).³¹ Even in death, God will provide for his faithful children (Revelation 6:9-11; 14:3).

So then, what should our response be to God’s providential care for his children? We should trust God and know that he is *“able to make all grace abound ... having always all sufficiency in everything, may abound unto every good work”* (2 Corinthians 9:8). We should also be extremely grateful and thankful. The Psalmist wrote: *“Bless Jehovah, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits”* (Psalm 103:2).

Our Response to God’s Providence

Our study of God’s providence should not be merely theological or theoretical. We should respond to God’s providence in a practical way with proper living each day. Knowing that there is a God and he is alive and works providentially in our life, how should we live?

First, there are some things we should not do. We should never grow despondent or despairing knowing that God is in control of his creation (Psalm 42; 43). We should never engage in murmuring, complaining, or bitterness, knowing what God gives us in life (even negative things like chastening) is for our good (1 Corinthians 10:10; Philippians 2:14; Hebrews 12:15). Those “negative” things that God works through his providence, like suffering, sickness, tribulation, and discipline all work for our good and make us and those around us better (Ecclesiastes 7:13-14; 9:1; Luke 21:19; Romans 5:3-5; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Philippians 1:12-14; James 1:2-3,12; 5:10-11; 1 Peter 1:6-9; 4:1-2, 16).³² We should never give into pressure, fear, or anxiety knowing that God’s providential hand will provide and take care of us (Psalm 91:5-6; Mt. 10:28; Phil. 4:5-7). Peter wrote: *“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you”* (1 Peter 5:6-7).

Finally, there are some things we should do. We should wait on God in humility and patience for vindication and deliverance from all wrongs (Psalm 37; 40:13ff; James 5:7ff). We should have courage and hope when harassed by the world (Psalm 60; 62). We should accept from God even what we cannot control, knowing that God is all-wise (Ecclesiastes 3:1-15; 2 Corinthians 12:8-10). We should develop a content attitude, knowing that God will give us what we need and what is best for us (Philippians 4:11-13; 1 Timothy 6:6-8; Hebrews 13:5). For example, we may pray for healing from sickness

³¹ See Warren and Elkins, pages 297-323.

³² For a discussion of how good and evil exists within the realm of God’s providence see Cottrell, pages 379-409; and Warren and Elkins, pages 259-275, 403-409.

and receive a “No” from God like Paul did (2 Corinthians 12:7). In this case, we continue to trust God knowing that whatever he gives us through his providence will be for our good.

We should pray more to him and praise him, knowing that God will hear us, respond to us, and always care for his own (Matthew 6:11; 7:7-11). We should trust God because we are dependent upon him (Acts 17:28), we are submissive to his will (Job 1:21), and we are confident that everything will turn out according to his will (James 4:15). Since providence does not eliminate personal responsibility, we should keep doing our part to be active in living right in our physical work (1 Thessalonians 4:10-12) and our spiritual work (Philippians 2:12-13). We should seize every opportunity to work heartily for God (Ecclesiastes 9:7-10).

Let us all be grateful, faithful, and obedient to our God who is alive and providentially working today inside and outside of his holy word. Let us go out and live by God’s “Five P’s” ... prayer, preaching, perseverance, praise, and providence!