

Providence, Provision & Prayer

Matthew 6:5-8

June 23, 2013

Introduction

For years we have brought our thanksgiving and prayer requests to God during our corporate prayer time. There have been countless surgeries, job situations, marriage situations, family relationships, various political races and births of children that we have brought to the Lord in prayer. If we were diligent to record all of those and keep track of how the Lord has answered them, we would be blessed to see His faithfulness in all of the situations. Nothing could be sweeter to our body than rejoicing in the kindness of God's provision. Nothing could be more lovely than seeing the fruit of God's good providence.

Right away we should notice that the words providence and provision come from the same words. The Latin word *providere* means to see beforehand. Providence is God's ability to know all things beforehand and provision is that which God supplies to us based on His foreknowledge. Today we will consider what the Bible has to say about God's knowledge of all things and dominion over all things. Having considered that we should be drawn to understand how we then should live. How do the truths of God's providence in every last detail affect the way we think and live?

The Text

Matthew 6:5-8 - ⁵ And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ⁶ But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. ⁷ And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen *do*. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

- ◆ Notice first in these verses that we are told both how we are to act and how we are to *not* act. First, we are told not be like the hypocrites when we pray. One of our primary concerns when we pray should be that we are speaking appropriately before God. We are coming before Him in prayer not before the crowds. We are tempted to be more concerned about how we sound to others rather than how we sound to our Lord.
- ◆ Secondly we are told not to be like the heathen when we pray. Of particular interest for our topic today is where we are told not to be like the pagans when we pray because our Father knows what we need before we ask Him. This means that the motivation or purpose of our prayer is not because we need to bring God up to speed on the details of the situation. Instead the purpose of prayer is to instruct and remind us of our dependency upon Him and to include us in His involvement in the situation. Pagans think that they are adding to God's knowledge in some way in prayer but Jesus explicitly says not to think this way but instead we must remember that He knows all things.
- ◆ "...your Father know the things you have need of..." this single truth unravels the superstitions that Jesus condemns—the vain glory in being seen by men and false piety of lengthy prayers.
- ◆ No matter how significant or trivial, whatever your need is, God is aware of it before you are. Your Father is involved in the process before you even know about the situation. *Prayer is God's ordained means of involving us in God's involvement.*

But if God knows what things we have need of, before we ask him, where lies the advantage of prayer? If he is ready, of his own free will, to assist us, what purpose does it serve to employ our prayers, which interrupt the spontaneous course of his providence? The very design of prayer furnishes an easy answer. Believers do not pray, with the view of informing God about things unknown to him, or of exciting him to do his duty, or of urging him as though he were reluctant. On the contrary, they pray, in order that they may arouse themselves to seek him, that they may exercise their faith in meditating on his promises, that they may relieve themselves from their anxieties by pouring them into his bosom; in a word, that they may declare that from Him alone they hope and expect, both for themselves and for others, all good things. God himself, on the other hand, has purposed freely, and without being asked, to bestow blessings upon us; but he promises that he will grant them to our prayers. We must, therefore, maintain both of these truths, that He freely anticipates our wishes, and yet that we obtain by prayer what we ask. — John Calvin

Related Texts

- ◆ **Hebrews 4:13** - This verse teaches that nothing is obscured from His sight. Everything that is done, is done right in His full view. God is present everywhere at all times—we fail to believe this truth when we sin.
- ◆ **Amos 3:6** - God's presence or involvement in all things is not limited to church activities but even in catastrophes and calamities. Our temptation is to say that God is not involved in disasters but He is in blessings. But this truncates the Scriptures and is usually motivated by a desire to protect the character of the God we proclaim to worship. However, such protection is really just idolatry—we must worship the true God not the cleaned-up, politically-correct version.

- ◆ **Matthew 10:29-31** - Jesus teaches here that not even a sparrow falls to the ground apart from the will of the Father. He also teaches that God's knowledge of us is so exhaustive that even the hairs on our heads are numbered—God knows us better than we know ourselves. Because of this truth, we are told not to fear.

Conclusion

- ◆ **Believe** - When we come to embrace the sovereignty of God and rejoice in His providence, these doctrines become precious to us and we wouldn't want the universe to be any other way. These truths are a great source of comfort. Unfortunately, many in Christendom today despise the thought of an exhaustively sovereign God who controls all things. If God is going to foreordain anything for us, He necessarily must foreordain all things. Simply put, if God declares that He will guarantee anything, in order to do so, He must have control over everything. We need to get beyond a debate level of understanding or belief and move toward loving the nourishment of these truths. Believe the Word of God.
- ◆ **Understand** - We are called to obey Him and we do so not by generating some emotional frame of mind. God gives us faith to initially believe and then grants us situations and trials that bolster our faith and prove the genuineness of our faith. Your heart and mind do not guard the peace of God. Rather, *Philippians 4:6-7* says that it is the peace of God that will guard your heart and mind. God supplies faithfully all that we need to trust Him and obey Him. Be diligent to remember how kind and faithful God has been to you in your lifetime and then also see in the Scriptures how God has been faithful to His people for all time. The only proper response to the track record of God's faithfulness is faith & trust.
- ◆ **Give Thanks** - God is not struggling in heaven trying to figure out what to do about that serious situation in your life. He does not struggle because He is the one who has brought the situation to you and if He has brought it to you it is because you are in need of the situation. Therefore the Scripture calls us to give thanks in all situations. *Ephesians 5:20; James 1:2*
- ◆ **Sing** - One of the fruits of faith and thanksgiving is the singing of praise. In the context of the command to thank God for all things in *Ephesians 5*, Paul also stresses the need to address each other through the singing of the Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. *Psalms 9:1-13*
- ◆ **Rest** - Rest in your place in Christ. Having been placed in Christ, you are a beloved Son or Daughter and God's kindness, love and discipline are His mercies for you. The circumstances of life do not make shaky your place in Christ therefore do not let them shake you.

'Praying for particular things', said I, 'always seems to me like advising God how to run the world. Wouldn't it be wiser to assume that He knows best?' 'On the same principle', said he, 'I suppose you never ask a man next to you to pass the salt, because God knows best whether you ought to have salt or not. And I suppose you never take an umbrella because God knows best whether you ought to be wet or dry.' 'That's quite different,' I protested. 'I don't see why,' said he. 'The odd thing is that He should let us influence the course of events at all. But since He lets us do it in one way, I don't see why He shouldn't let us do it in the other.' - C S Lewis