

Our Providential God

**God is not a genie in the lamp, or a heavenly welfare system.
He is so much greater than these:**

God, even in the minds of sincere Christians perhaps, is pictured much like the genie in Aladdin's lamp, who can be called upon to magically grant a person's every wish, or like a sort of welfare system, which can be called upon when life gets tough to perform all sorts of manipulations to solve our physical problems.

When thinking of God, then, it's in the hope and expectation that he's fully involved in our lives, interacting with us constantly at a physical level - which, of course, he's capable of doing - but his thoughts are primarily directed toward his overall purpose.

And what is God's overall purpose? It's to bring us into a relationship with him, to make us one with him - "one as we are one," as Jesus phrases it when praying to his Father in **John 17:11, 22**. And that involves a healing of the mind and spirit rather than a healing and sustaining of the physical body, which in any case God considers to be crucified with Christ and in his view as dead (**Romans 6:6, Colossians 3:3**).

God does indeed ensure that "All things work together for good for those that love God," but the "good" he's working is not our physical comfort and well-being, nor is it our success and prosperity, or even our physical health and strength. Our own experience as Christians tells us that God is not primarily focused on these things because we still live with sickness, suffering, failure and disability in the church. Thousands of prayers directed toward healing and physical blessings aren't answered. As a genie, therefore, God's a failure, because he doesn't answer all our wishes! And as a welfare system he comes up short too, because he doesn't always bail us out of our physical problems.

It's a real dilemma for us, because if our confidence in God is upheld and validated only by personal evidence of supernatural intervention, miraculous guidance, "God working everything out," or by a tangible healing of the body, we have to account for God's apparent "failures." Consequently we are left with an uncertain foundation and with little confidence in the "things which are unseen," which God tells us are the basis of real faith. There's the added dilemma of so-called "miraculous successes" too, which lead to pride and boasting rather than to faith.

How, then, is God a "providential" God? If he truly cares for us and he truly directs everything for our good, how does he do it? If he's really a God of grace, mercy and love, how does he show it? If he isn't into providing us with an enchanted life of miraculous blessings and supernatural interventions, what does he do for us instead? And if we can't read into ordinary events the personal guidance of the Holy Spirit in order to validate our belief and sustain our hopes, what exactly can we base our faith on?

It's based on God's limitless providence being directed toward his creation as a whole. It's in recognizing he's fully involved at every level, precisely, positively and infallibly working toward the ultimate goal of reconciling all things to himself in Jesus Christ, just as he promised in **Colossians 1:19-20**.

Never, therefore, does he abandon any part of his creation at any time to chance or necessity, let alone to the forces of evil. He is always present within his creation, upholding it, providing for it, directly and personally active in it, working with it even in its fallen state, while never surrendering his transcendence and holiness. In his sovereign position as Creator and Redeemer, he is over all things in our world without ever detracting from their reality or impairing their nature or liberty, yet in such a way that in his absolute freedom God makes everything serve his ultimate purpose of love and of fellowship with himself.

He can even take things that resist him, like death and evil, and make them serve his purpose, too. Witness the ultimate evil of the crucifixion, when God turned that death and evil into everlasting life and brought about the redemption of the creation! See how he

turns everything round to fit his ultimate purpose and love? That's the providence of God. He reigns supreme over sin, death and anything else that threatens to separate us from his love, and everything he does springs from his selfless love, constantly and actively poured out upon the whole of creation in free and total self-sacrifice.

And in all the creation, humanity alone was created to share in the life of love and fellowship that God actually is in himself as Father, Son and Spirit. God elected not to exist alone but to share his life with us, so in all creation humanity is the closest to God's heart and the object of his unfailing love, which he fully demonstrated when he gave himself for us in Jesus Christ for our redemption and salvation.

God then came personally into his creation as a human being just like us, to reveal his astounding love by doing for us in Jesus Christ all that we could not do for ourselves. He now continues to provide everything for us to complete his purpose. And what is that purpose? That we live eternally with him in a perfect love relationship. The providence and love of God conceived this and he will not cease until it's done.

How does he fulfill his purpose for us, though? First, by redeeming us through Christ Jesus, and then by the communion of the Spirit bringing us into fellowship with the Father (**Galatians 4:6**), creating a new life for us in Christ, hidden with him in God (**Colossians 3:3**). We can look forward to the time, then, when this hidden life will be fully manifested, when all things will be made new, and humanity will be one with God, united in his perfect love.

Meanwhile, and on into the future, the providential God will provide "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" that we might be "holy and without blame before him in love (**Ephesians 1:3-4**)." This is the ultimate purpose for God's providence, to ensure that we are provided with everything necessary for us to enter into - and eternally share in - the spiritual fellowship and love relationship which is the Father, Son and Spirit.

We still have to die physically, but our spirit, or mind, survives death. It will be healed from the spiritual corruption of sin, and we will truly "have the mind of Christ." For the present, however, our experience tells us that even though we are forgiven and the Spirit of Jesus lives within us, our minds are still a long way away from the mind of Christ. But God's providence will triumph by healing our whole spiritual condition and changing us from within so that we'll be made fit to share in God's life (**Colossians 1:12**).

Is God at all interested in what happens to us physically, then? Yes. He can bless and enhance our physical lives too, without impairing his spiritual working with us, and he delights in doing so because he loves us.

We can all attest to the love God has lavished upon us in protecting us and blessing us, but "if in this life only we have hope in Christ, then we are of all men most pitiable (**1 Corinthians 15:19**)." God's all embracing providence extends far beyond providing temporary enhancements for this dead life. God has eternity in mind, and the whole of creation to bless and share with us. So, if this physical life is not all we'd wish it to be, we have the assurance "that the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (**Romans 8:18**)." That's God's providence.

Aladdin's genie is nothing by comparison. It offers only physical wishes fulfilled for this life and nothing for eternity. It feeds only our physical desires and wishes, a temporary escape into fairyland, with no inkling of the vast, all-encompassing, eternal loving purpose of God for all creation.

So, which would we rather have – Aladdin's Lamp or the Providential God?