

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

In our present trial-state, while we walk by faith and not by sight, the question as to the leadings of divine providence is often a perplexing one to many. In many instances the discerning and experienced children of God can see very serious errors in the course of some who suppose they are following the leadings of divine providence, but who in fact are far astray from the Lord's expressed will.

Ah! says one, there was a peculiar coincidence in my life, or a peculiar train of circumstances which indicated to me my [R1239 : page 2] course of action, and I am so persuaded that the leading was of the Lord, that nothing can move me from my course. Who has not met some instances where the delusion was so strong that even the Word of God had no power to dispel it? The subject, therefore, is one worthy of very careful consideration; for certain it is that God does lead, direct and discipline his children not only by his written word, but also by making the circumstances of life work together for their good.

But how, then, shall we account for the misleadings as well as the true leadings of some who, we have abundant reason to believe, are God's children. From the Scriptures we learn not only that all things shall work together for good to them that love God, to the called according to his purpose, that God's eye is upon all their ways, and that not a hair of their heads shall fall to the ground without his notice, but we also learn that the prince of this world has power to deceive and to lead astray many, and that *if it were possible*, he would deceive even the very elect.

The elect, therefore, are the only class who cannot be deceived. God is pledged to see to it that they shall not be deceived either by circumstances, appearances or perversions of his Word.

Who are these favored elect ones who are so guarded and protected on every side, that no weapon that is formed against them can by any means prosper? (Isa. 54:17.) We answer, they are the called and faithful and chosen ones. Many are called, but few are faithful to the conditions of the call, and few, therefore, are chosen. We are told that a thousand of the called ones shall fall at our side and ten thousand at our right hand, but that that which shall cause their fall will not come near the elect. They cannot be moved.

In the fullest sense no one is elected to membership in the body of Christ until he has finished his course of self-sacrifice, even unto death. And yet from the moment of consecration we are reckoned as of the elect, and treated as such to the end, unless at some point in our course we prove unworthy of the favor, and as unfruitful branches are lopped off from our connection with the vine, which is Christ.

Consequently, those assurances of preservation in the midst of the pestilences and flying arrows of this evil day are only to the called and faithful – to those who have heeded the heavenly calling, presented their bodies living sacrifices, and who, true to their covenant, are keeping the sacrifice on the altar. These cannot fall; it is impossible to deceive them; and no weapon that is formed against them can prosper. So in this day when the pestilence of infidelity is raging, and the sanitary condition of the public mind forebodes a wide prevalence of the disease, and when the disease is taking on its most insidious and destructive forms, every consecrated child of God needs to look well to the spiritual condition of his system in general, to see that self-will is indeed dead, and that in simplicity of heart he is walking in the Master's footprints.

We need to bear in mind that the glorified church is to be but a little flock, possibly only a literal hundred and forty-four thousand (Rev. 7:4); that in all probability the majority of that

number long ago finished their course and fell asleep in hope of the first resurrection, and that only a very small and very choice company is now desired to complete the church. The heavenly Bridegroom desires for his bride only those proved faithful under all the tests applied. But those rejected from that position are not cut off from all favor; they are simply not wanted in that near relationship. Consequently their deception is permitted for a time; and, like unfaithful Israel, for a time they stumble and fall; but if not persistently wilful they will yet be recovered out of the snare of the Adversary, though probably not until their opportunity to be of the bride of Christ is past.

Just as God permitted Satan to deceive Eve as to the result of her disobedience when she really desired to disobey God; as he permitted circumstances and surroundings to deceive unworthy Israel, who were too proud to receive the humble Nazarene as the promised Messiah and King, and to blind them to the spiritual blessings of the Gospel Age, reserved for the meek and faithful few; as he has for centuries permitted the delusions and deceptive appearances of Antichrist to flourish and deceive all who loved the world and desired the mere outward forms of godliness, so that the faithful few only would follow Christ through privations and persecutions; and as in the end of the Millennial Age he will again permit all those unworthy of life, because at heart disloyal to God, to be deceived with the delusive hope of life, regardless of that merit which alone can secure it; so we must not be surprised to find some now fully persuaded to a course contrary to the expressed will of God, on account of certain deceptions and delusions which have power over them because of some unfaithfulness on their part toward God and the covenant of consecration they had made with him.

While, therefore, the saints may and do rejoice in the manifest leadings of divine providence in the shaping of their course and their guidance in it toward the prize of their high calling, according

to the precious promises above referred to, if they would not be deceived by a permitted counterfeit leading of the adversary, which will seem to be in the right direction, but which will actually be misleading, they must look well to it that they are carefully fulfilling the conditions under which alone such promises of safe leading can be claimed. They must see to it that they are still *abiding* in Christ, that they are faithful to their covenant of self-sacrifice, and hence still of the elect body of Christ, to whom the safe and sure leading is promised by him who will never leave us nor forsake us, so long as we humbly and faithfully abide in him. "There is a way which *seemeth* right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 16:25) – if pursued to the end. But we may hope that many, who through some unfaithfulness are for a time beguiled into error of doctrine or of practice, may yet be recovered from the snare of the adversary.

And if one so ensnared should, on examination of his own heart, discover his deflection from the straight course and quickly repent of it, and again, from the standpoint of a thorough determination to greater faithfulness, view his course, God will indeed "show unto him the path of life" and give him grace to walk in it. For it is written, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father." (1 John 2:1.) Consequently, while there is need for great watchfulness and carefulness, there is no cause for discouragement on the part of any who are faithful, or who in view of past unfaithfulness are sincerely repentant and very diligent in efforts to overcome weaknesses and hindrances.

The *faithful, consecrated* ones, therefore, may recognize the circumstances of their daily life, *from the time of their consecration*, [R1240 : page 2] as shaped by the Lord. If they have severe trials and testings of faith, of patience or of endurance; or if they have great obstacles and difficulties to surmount in accomplishing their fervent desire to do the Lord's will and the Lord's work; these should all be regarded as so many favors of God which thus afford them opportunities of overcoming and of proving their

faithfulness. Or if *in the faithful pursuance of their course* an unseen hand gently smooths the way at times, and grants a sweet refreshment whereby new strength may be gathered for future trials, this too may be gratefully recognized as the same divine providence.

"If [for a time] on a quiet sea
To our haven we calmly sail,
With grateful hearts, O God, to thee,
We'll own the favoring gale.

"But should the surges rise
And rest delay to come,
Blest be the sorrow, kind the storm,
That drives us nearer home."

But if because of a decline of zeal for God, or a waning spirituality, we find ourselves smoothly drifting along with little to disturb or oppose us, there is indeed great room for fear. And though God may permit such for a long time to thus drift away, and even effectually separate themselves from the body of Christ, as surely as he loves them the surges of trouble will by and by rise about them for their discipline and correction.

Thus it will be seen that from the standpoint of faithfulness or unfaithfulness our experiences may be very differently regarded. Therefore, if any of the consecrated have been unfaithful to their privileges, let them *beware* of the leadings of circumstances, etc. But the faithful may rejoice in all things and in every thing give thanks; for "*all things* [whether seemingly favorable or unfavorable] shall work together for good *to them.*"

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