



Monergism

A SERMON ON
God's Providence

ARTHUR DENT



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A Sermon on God's Providence

Very godly and profitable: Preached at Southshoobery in Essex by
Arthur Dent, Minister of God's Word.

The Third Impression.

John 19, Verses 10-11.

Then said Pilate unto him, speakest thou not unto me, knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?
Jesus answered, thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.

Imprinted at London for John Wright. 1609.

A Platform Made for the Proof of God's Providence,

That Is, for the Examination of the Truth of This Doctrine: Whether God, by His Providence, Rules All Things Generally and Every Creature and Action Particularly.

Text: "The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposition thereof is of the Lord." - Proverbs 16:33.

It would be desirable that all Christians understood that which they confess with their mouths when they recite the articles of their faith, gathered from the Apostles' doctrine.

The Confession is concise, and each word in it is very significant. A proper understanding of it would eliminate all heresies from our minds.

The foundations of religion are contained therein, and just as it is considered shameful for a philosopher to be ignorant of the principles of philosophy, and for artisans to be ignorant of the fundamentals of their respective crafts, it is an even greater shame for us Christians to profess Christianity and yet remain ignorant of the basics of our religion.

I wish that every person who bears the name of a Christian thoroughly understood and was fully instructed in these principles.

Then, I would not need to labor extensively to prove this doctrine.

For every one of us, when we profess God to be almighty, acknowledges that He rules everything by His providence. To help us understand what we profess, I intend to primarily address these two points:

Firstly, that Christ, the Son of God, possesses the same providence as God the Father.

Secondly, that the providence of God governs all things in a general sense and every specific thing individually.

However, in discussing these two points, I shall not enumerate all that can be said on this matter but merely touch upon some key points summarily, which may aid in better comprehending the extensive and erudite treatises that many notable individuals have written on this subject. Regarding the first:

That Christ, the Son of God, governs all things as well as God the Father, is proven by reason, example, and authority.

By reason: If God, by His wisdom, created the world, meaning that the eternal wisdom of God, His Word, the everlasting Son of God, was present with God when He made the world, then He is also with Him in governing the world. Since He was with God when the world was made, He is with Him in its governance.

The fairness of the first proposition is grounded in very strong reasoning. Just as God created the world through His wisdom, it is unreasonable to believe that God governs the world without His wisdom, as that would imply governance by chance.

The second proposition is supported by the testimony of the Apostle in Hebrews 1: "By whom also he made the worlds."

By way of example, in Genesis 48:13-15: "Then took Joseph them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, so he brought them unto him. But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head, which was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head (directing his hands on purpose) for Manasseh was the elder. Also he blessed Joseph and said, 'The God before whom my Fathers Abraham & Isaac did walk, the God which hath fed me all my life long unto this day.'"

In these words, Jacob acknowledges God's providence extending to specific individuals, even to himself.

Then, it follows in verse 5:26, "The Angel which hath delivered me from all evil, bless the children, and let my name be named upon them, and the name of my Fathers Abraham, and Isaac, that they may grow as fish, into a multitude in the midst of the earth." In these words, the holy Patriarch Jacob attributes that particular providence to the Angel which, in the previous verse, he had attributed to God. This is evident by the fact that he calls this Angel "the Angel of the Lord," which signifies the Son of God.

Therefore, in this context, Jacob attributes providence over all things and persons to the Angel, who is the Son of God, just as to God the Father.

By authority, in John 5, verse 17, we find: "My Father worketh and I work." The works that Christ speaks of here are not limited to creation alone but also encompass the governance of all created things. The use of the word "hitherto" in this verse indicates that

Christ meant not only the initial work of creation with His Father but also an ongoing work, which cannot be interpreted as anything other than the governance of all things with His Father.

It is important to note that the works of the Trinity are undivided. Thus, what is the Father's work is also the work of the Son and the Holy Ghost.

The fact that the Son of God performs the same works as the Father is already established. The same can be affirmed of the Holy Ghost, as warranted by God's word, as seen in Psalm 139: "Where shall I go from thy Spirit? Or where shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend into Heaven, thou art there: If I lie down in hell, thou art there. Let me take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the Sea; yet thither shall thine hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me." Thus, the first point is briefly confirmed: Christ, the Son of God, and the Holy Ghost, govern all things just as God the Father does.

Now, for the second point, that God, by His providence, governs all and everything.

While many may readily acknowledge that God governs all things in general through His providence, they deny that every particular thing is ruled by the same. I intend to address this viewpoint more extensively, though not as learnedly as the subject deserves (for who is capable of doing it justice?). Philosophers have held various opinions on this matter: Epicurus asserted that all things were governed by chance and fortune, and that God led an idle and carefree existence in the heavens. Although everyone verbally condemns this impious opinion, our lives serve as clear evidence that we embrace it in our hearts and souls.

Indeed, if we held a higher view of God than Epicurus did, we would not follow his path so closely or live so licentiously, as if God paid us no heed.

The Peripatetics and other philosophers espoused a different opinion. They taught that things beyond the heavens are moved, guided, and governed by God Himself, while things beneath the orbit of the Moon are governed partly by chance and fortune, partly by human counsel and contrivance, and partly by the blind and senseless forces of nature.

There is a third opinion of the Stoics, which asserts that all things are ruled by fate or destiny, a secret order and chain of causes in which everything is so securely bound that both God Himself and humanity are confined within those limits.

This was considered a rather delicate opinion by the poets, who, in an attempt to excuse the weakness of their god, Jupiter, claimed that he wept because he was hindered by destiny's force, preventing him from setting Sarpedon free.

The fourth opinion belongs to Plato, who acknowledges that God, through His providence, governs all things in a general sense. However, God delegates the oversight of specific matters to minor deities, half-deities, and even devils. These four opinions serve as the foundation for all other beliefs concerning God's providence, and every other viewpoint can be traced back to one of these.

Some, even among us Christians, try to escape one danger only to fall into another. They dare not deny that God, through His providence, governs all things, yet they refuse to accept that He governs every individual thing, fearing that it might lead to what they perceive as absurdities. In their attempt to avoid absurdity, they inadvertently

commit impiety and stray dangerously from the truth. However, may this never find a place in your hearts, dear reader, and may you never be possessed by such notions. To steer clear of this, avoid the root cause of such thoughts: ignorance of God's Word. As God has kindled in your heart a desire for knowledge, do not extinguish this godly desire. Pursue it earnestly through heartfelt and fervent prayer, and you will find it. When you find it, you will realize that no absurdity is imposed upon any doctrine rooted in God's Word. You need not fear this doctrine, as others do. I will first briefly discuss its truth and demonstrate that God governs all things generally and every particular thing specifically. Then, I will address the chief objections raised against it by those who attempt to make it seem absurd.

Regarding the first point:

As this argument has been discussed in various ways and people have delved into it with great curiosity, especially because whichever path they choose, they seem to encounter absurdities, I believe it is best to adhere to the well-trodden path. I intend to discuss this doctrine as I have been taught in the Word of God and diligently remove any elements that may seem unbecoming of the most pure nature of God in the judgment of man.

Even if my ignorance were such that I couldn't resolve these inconveniences, you, along with all Christians, are obligated to accept this true doctrine with humility. Blame me, not the doctrine, if I am unable to dispel all those things that might appear absurd to human judgment. Although it is not my intention to address all that philosophers and others say against the governance of everything by God's providence, in my opinion, all their arguments against it can be easily refuted by a single argument. If God is a God (as they all confess, and even if they deny it, it can easily be proven against

them), He is the most perfect being. However, that which is most perfect has nothing more perfect than itself, and nothing can be imagined as more perfect than that which is inherently and absolutely perfect. Therefore, nothing, and nothing more perfect, can be imagined than God. Hence, I conclude that if God did not govern all things in general and every individual thing specifically, we might imagine that there is something more perfect than God, a deity responsible for the care of each specific thing. But it is clear that no such deity or Godhead can be conceived.

It is false, then, for them to infer that God does not rule every particular thing by His providence, and the contrary is true, as we teach. Otherwise, the God they imagine to be idle and careless, as they prattle, is not truly a God but, as Cicero once said of their master, Epicurus, I say of them: they acknowledge a God in words but, in truth, deny that there is one. But, setting philosophers aside, let us examine what Scripture teaches us.

The first passage I will use to support this doctrine is from the Epistle to the Hebrews, Chapter 1, Verse 3, where it is said of the Son of God that He upholds, that is, moves and governs, all things by His mighty word. He who concedes that He governs all things does not exempt any one thing from His governance. We can then confidently conclude from this scripture that God governs all and everything.

But to prevent any potential escape routes for adversaries, let us delve further into what the Scripture teaches us about the governance of every individual thing by God's providence.

I won't overwhelm you with numerous passages; instead, I'll suffice with a few examples from which the truth of this doctrine can be inferred.

So, in a concise manner, I aim to establish the proof. All of God's creatures possess either the gift of free choice or lack this liberty of choice. Those endowed with it include Angels, both good and evil, as well as humans, both virtuous and wicked. On the other hand, those devoid of this liberty of choice encompass all other living beings created by God, along with His creatures that lack life. Yet, God takes special care of every one of these creatures, directing each according to His will.

The books of Job and the Psalms frequently delve into this topic. If I were to compile all the evidence from them, I would nearly transcribe their entire contents. Nevertheless, I will present some examples and leave the remainder for you to gather, with the hope that it will encourage you to engage in frequent reading of these texts.

To begin, in Psalm 147, the Prophet declares that God covers the heavens with clouds, prepares rain for the earth, and causes grass to grow upon the mountains. Yet, clouds, rain, and grass lack souls and life, yet God's wonderful providence drives and governs them as He pleases. In Psalm 148, the Prophet asserts that fire, hail, snow, vapors, and stormy winds execute God's word, implying that they are ruled and governed by His word—subject to His command. Furthermore, in Psalm 135, it is stated that whatever pleases the Lord, He accomplishes both in heaven and on earth, in the sea and all depths. He brings forth clouds from the ends of the earth, creates lightning with rain, and draws forth winds from His treasuries. Christ our Savior, in the Gospel of Matthew, instructs us to learn from how the lilies of the field grow, neither toiling nor spinning. He goes on to affirm that God clothes the grass of the field. These passages demonstrate that God, through His providence, cares for and governs not only His living creatures but also lifeless elements,

such as clouds, rain, winds, grass, fire, hail, snow, vapors, lilies, and the like.

He extends the same providential care to other creatures endowed with life and sensation but lacking reason and the liberty of choice, as mentioned earlier. In Psalm 147, we read that God provides food to beasts and young ravens that cry. Additionally, in Psalm 104, verse 14, the Prophet says that God causes grass to grow for cattle, and later, in verse 27, he affirms that all beasts, fowls, and fish wait upon the Lord, who gives them food in due season. God provides, and they gather; He opens His hand, and they are filled with good things. Christ also confirms this in Matthew 6, stating that the heavenly Father feeds the birds of the air, even though they do not sow or reap or gather into barns. In Matthew 10, Christ asks whether sparrows are not sold for a farthing and reassures that not a single one of them falls to the ground without the Father's knowledge, meaning God's.

From these passages, it is abundantly evident that God exercises providential care over every individual creature, whether it possesses life and sensation but lacks reason and choice, or it possesses reason and choice, as in the case of angels and humans.

However, some erroneously believe that God exercises special providential care only over humans, particularly those made in His image and likeness, while neglecting other creatures. This opinion is unfounded, as has been clarified earlier. Others differentiate between the godly and the wicked, claiming that God cares specially for the former but disregards the latter. Yet, the word of God refutes this opinion. In Matthew 5, Christ teaches that our heavenly Father causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, sending rain on the just and the unjust. In 1 Timothy 4, Paul states that God is the Savior of all men, especially those who believe. From these passages, we

understand that God indeed has a special care for His own, but this does not mean that He leaves the wicked to be governed by chance and fortune. If God provides for the belongings of the wicked, such as their cattle, grass, and grain, it is evident that He also provides for them, their owners and masters. His providence extends to both the godly and the wicked, as His divine power governs all things according to His will. Just as a prince and general of an army is not only concerned for the soldiers in his ranks but also for their provisions, ensuring the army is well-equipped to maintain authority and obedience among the inhabitants, God's providence extends to His Church. He governs and moderates all aspects of creation necessary for His Church to exist on earth.

As for matters related to the nourishment, clothing, safety, and peaceful dwelling of the members of the Church, those who are not part of the true Church are, nevertheless, governed by God's providence for the benefit of His Church. In this way, even Patriarchs found favor in the eyes of infidels because the Lord directed and influenced the hearts of infidels as He pleased.

The fact that God rules not only over each individual person but also over all the various actions of people is substantiated by Proverbs 16:3, which advises, "Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be directed." This is further affirmed in James 4, which warns those who make plans for the future without acknowledging God's providence. It stresses the uncertainty of life and the need to say, "If the Lord wills, we will do this or that." James emphasizes that God governs human actions and decisions, and without His will, we can do nothing, not even plan for the future. Additionally, Paul acknowledges that God hindered and delayed his intended journeys, demonstrating God's control over human actions.

Allow me to provide two examples to illustrate and clarify this fundamental doctrine: God's governance over the actions of all people, both good and bad. The story of Joseph in the book of Genesis contains many instances that support this concept. The conclusion of Joseph's story encapsulates this idea, as Joseph says to his brothers, "You thought evil against me, but God disposed it for good." In this narrative, various individuals and their actions are significant: Jacob (Joseph's father), Joseph's brothers, Joseph himself, Potiphar (Joseph's master), Potiphar's wife, Pharaoh, and Pharaoh's servants. These individuals undertook diverse actions, some commendable, others reprehensible, with varying degrees of morality. Yet, God, through His providence, orchestrated all these actions and individuals for Joseph's ultimate benefit.

As David said in Psalm 105, "Moreover, he called for a famine upon the land: he brake the whole staff of bread. He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant." This demonstrates how God governs the wicked actions of people, such as the treacherous deeds of Joseph's brothers and the immoral conduct of Potiphar's wife, to bring about a favourable outcome. Even those actions intended to harm Joseph ultimately led to his great honour. God's power is so profound that He can make light shine out of darkness.

In the last chapter of the book of Jonah, we witness how God not only governs people but also all creatures, both sentient and insentient. Jonah left the city and sat on the east side, where he made a booth and sat in its shade to observe what would happen to the city. The Lord prepared a gourd, which grew over Jonah to provide shade and alleviate his discomfort. Jonah greatly appreciated the gourd. However, God then prepared a worm that withered the gourd, and as the sun rose, God sent a hot east wind, causing Jonah to faint

and wish for death. This account illustrates how God, through His providence, governs and moves all these creatures according to His will.

If Epicurus had witnessed this event, he might have attributed it to chance; Aristotle might have analysed all the causes; Chrysippus or Zeno, the Stoics, might have ascribed it to fate and destiny; and Plato might have attributed it to some lesser god. However, the Holy Spirit attributes the governance of all these things solely to God, who orchestrated them for Jonah's benefit.

In summary, both creatures lacking the gift of choice and those possessing it are governed and ruled by God through His supreme providence. Regarding the angels, whom I initially placed among the creatures with the liberty of choice, I will provide further details in the future, as their very name, "Angeli" (Angels), signifies that they are messengers sent from God, and they are referred to in the Epistle to the Hebrews as the ministers and servants of God.

So much for the first part, which addresses the truth of the doctrine that God governs all things in general and every particular thing in particular.

Now, I turn to the promise I made to tackle the unfolding and addressing of arguments made against this doctrine. The first argument they present is as follows: "God cannot govern all things generally and every creature and action without exceeding toil and grief of mind. But it agrees with the nature of God that He rests in quiet and is free from all labours. Therefore, God does not govern all and every particular thing."

To this argument, which is derived from the nature of God, I respond by stating that their first proposition is false. They claim that God

cannot govern all things generally and particularly without experiencing excessive toil and grief of mind. I not only deny this as false but also provide reasons for my denial. It's important to note that there are various types of actions: some are natural, some are forced, and others are intermediate, falling between the natural and the forced. Natural actions arise from the principles of nature itself, occurring without external assistance. Examples include the natural circular motions of celestial bodies, the ebb and flow of the sea, the natural tendencies of light objects to rise and heavy objects to fall, and the act of breathing. These actions occur effortlessly because they proceed on their own, without the need for external help.

On the other hand, forced actions, like trying to make a stone move upward when its natural tendency is to fall downward, are performed through coercion and cannot be sustained for long, as taught by Aristotle. Intermediate actions are those whose origins are in nature but require some form of external assistance, such as eating, drinking, and walking. However, when God acts, He does so without toil because His actions are natural to Him, and He acts freely. No external force can compel God, and He governs all things according to His own will. Far from being troubled by grief, God guides and preserves the entire world effortlessly, using the word of His power.

Their second argument is as follows: "It is unsuitable for God and entirely contrary to His nature to involve Himself in filthy and unclean matters. But He cannot govern every individual creature and their actions without involving Himself in many unclean and filthy matters. Therefore, He does not govern them."

I reject the second proposition, which claims that God cannot govern every individual creature and their actions without involving Himself in many unclean and filthy matters. It is false to conclude that God's

involvement with His creatures necessarily entails mingling with the impurities among them. To clarify this point, consider the analogy of the sun, which, among all visible creatures (excluding man), is the most excellent. The sun radiates its glory everywhere, including upon a dung heap. While its rays may heat the dung heap, just as they affect all other places and objects they penetrate, the sun itself is not contaminated by the defilements and uncleanness it encounters. The substance of the sun's rays does not mix with the things it pierces.

When someone accused Diogenes of entering a stews or brothel-house, he replied, "The Sun cometh thither also, and yet is not defiled therewith." He thus demonstrated that a wise and godly person, even if they enter unclean and filthy places and associate with impure individuals, does not immediately become tainted by their filthiness or infected by their vices. Therefore, if this philosopher could enter a brothel and emerge untarnished by their uncleanness, with their filthiness unable to cling to him, then God, whose nature is most pure and straightforward in governing His creatures, cannot be contaminated by their filthiness.

A third objection they raise is formulated as follows: "Every wise and good governor, unless greatly hindered, brings his work to a good, perfect, and desired end." This can be proven by various examples, such as a skilled pilot who successfully guides his ship to the intended harbour. However, nothing can prevent God from perfecting His works, and yet many of His creatures, such as monsters, madmen, and the lame, are imperfect. Therefore, it is argued that God does not govern every generation and conception.

To unravel this dilemma, we must remember the distinction of order in God's governance. There are two types of orders or courses that God employs in governing all things. One is ordinary, frequently

used by God, while the other is extraordinary, known only to God Himself, with reasons unknown to us. Nevertheless, we cannot conclude that God's works are inconsistent with each other because there appears to be some diversity and difference in the way God governs all things. This apparent difference is not due to God's rule but rather to the fluctuating judgments of our troubled minds. God's works should not be judged by our deceitful and often inaccurate assessments.

St. Augustine presented an example of two children, one dutiful and loving to his father, and the other disobedient and wicked. Both fathers were gravely ill. The obedient child fervently prayed for his father's recovery, while the rebellious one eagerly anticipated his father's death. In the end, both fathers died according to God's divine plan and direction.

It may seem perplexing that what pleases God may also displease Him, and what displeases Him may please Him. For instance, God was pleased with the good child's kindness but did not will that his father live longer. Conversely, He was displeased with the unnatural behaviour of the wicked child but willed his father's death. In God, there exists a certain secret ordinance, which is just, and an open and manifest ordinance, which is also righteous. However, Augustine and others have been criticized for suggesting that there is a double will in God – a secret and a revealed will. Those objecting claim that they cannot perceive this double will in God, asserting that God is straightforward without any appearance of deception.

In response, it should be noted that this difference in God's will, which we speak of, exists not properly in God but in us. It arises from our limited understanding and capacity to comprehend divine matters. In terms of our perception and judgment, we may perceive a

difference in God's will. Yet, according to God's infinite wisdom and knowledge, the creation of monsters, madmen, and physically impaired individuals is the most perfect and absolute act of His will.

If Aristotle were asked about the purpose of imperfections and deformities, he would answer that they resulted from defects and deficiencies in nature. However, Christ's statement about the man born blind in John 9 contradicts this view. Christ said, "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God should be shown on him." This means that God might be glorified through his condition. Since the ultimate purpose of all things is to bring glory to God, and since things are considered perfect when they achieve their intended purpose, even imperfections in some of God's creatures can be seen as perfect if they serve to glorify God.

In other words, while these creatures may appear imperfect when viewed in isolation, they can be considered perfect when their purpose is understood in relation to the glory of God. For if all creatures were made with the same form of perfection, there would be no diversity to illustrate and highlight the providence of God. The diversity in the outward appearance of creatures allows the providence of God to be more clearly evident.

In human judgment, many creatures such as flies, worms, and various types of serpents are often deemed not only unprofitable but also harmful. However, the Lord, as Moses demonstrates in the Old Testament, regards them as His treasures, from which He draws vengeance against His enemies, like arrows from a quiver.

These creatures were the instruments with which God punished Pharaoh, Antiochus, and Herod. Therefore, anyone who deems them unprofitable or unnecessary should consider that the Lord Himself finds uses for them in carrying out His divine purposes.

There are also many beneficial qualities in these creatures, some of which we understand, while others are known to physicians. Nicander and others have written extensively about them. Ancient scholars like Chrysostom, in his tenth Homily on Genesis, used this analogy: "In earthly matters, when we see things approved by wise and respected individuals, we do not disapprove of their judgment or contradict it; rather, we prefer their judgment over our own. How much more should we adopt the same mindset towards all of God's creatures, knowing that the Creator of all things made them? Since we have received His verdict that everything He made was very good, we should suspend our judgments and keep them in silence. We should not dare to place the judgments of all men above the Lord's."

In other words, we should trust the Lord's judgment of all His creatures, even though we may not fully comprehend His reasons due to the limitations of our understanding. We should believe that the Lord created everything with great wisdom, mercy, and purpose, even if we don't understand the causes of His works.

Chrysostom goes on to emphasize that we should be confident that God made everything in His wisdom and mighty mercy.

Aristotle also testified that nature made nothing in vain, even though he was ignorant of true religion. Therefore, we should attribute this perfection in God's creation, where nothing is made in vain but all things are created with great wisdom, since all His works ultimately glorify Him, which is the highest and chief end of all things.

Now, as for the fourth argument against the providence of God: If God, who is most wise and just in His judgments, governs everything, including every particular thing, there should not be such great troubles in commonwealths, especially in the Church, which the Lord cares for as His sanctuary. But both in the Church and

commonwealths, there is significant unrest, with violations of both divine and human laws. Good men are treated cruelly, while evildoers rejoice and celebrate their wickedness without restraint. Therefore, some argue that God does not govern all things in commonwealths and churches.

This argument, drawn from the nature of God's justice, which seems contrary to His government and providence when He appears to see, moderate, and tolerate all these outrages and disorders, is one of the main supports of Epicurus's opinion. Many individuals today labour daily to tarnish the name of Epicurus with everyone, yet they are content to live like Epicureans themselves. Even our adversaries, the Papists, raise this argument against us. It undoubtedly carries weight with it, as evidenced by David, who confessed that he was deeply troubled, and his feet almost gave way, his steps nearly slipping when he observed the prosperity of the wicked and the harsh treatment of the godly. However, when he entered the sanctuary of God, then he understood their end. It was only when David went into God's school and learned from His Word and Holy Spirit that he realised God ordered all things most wisely and justly.

After Pompey suffered defeat in the battle against Caesar and sought refuge in Mytilene, he engaged in a debate with the philosopher Cratippus in his garden. He questioned whether there was indeed a God who ruled the Earth by His providence. Pompey's previous prosperity in various quarrels and his subsequent defeat led him to believe that God did not care about human affairs and that all things happened by chance. Many wise men of the world judge and speak in this manner regarding such events.

However, the Holy Spirit teaches us to judge these matters differently. When Moses, in his song in Deuteronomy 32, was to

deliver God's warnings to the people if they were disobedient, which the rebellious Israelites later experienced, he used this preface: "Perfect is the work of the mighty God, for all His ways are judgment. God is true and without wickedness; just and righteous is He." By this, he conveyed that whatever the world might say about the causes of afflictions, God sends forth various calamities from His treasury with great wisdom. Some come as punishment for the wicked, while others serve to test the godly. As stated in the Book of Job 34:30, "For the sins of the people, the hypocrite does reign," meaning that tyrants, under the pretence of executing justice, sit on the throne of justice and are, in reality, hypocrites who oppress the people.

Woe be to thee, says the Prophet Isaiah, which spoilest, for thou shalt be spoiled. Indeed, one tyrant often plagues another, and though a tyrant plagues all nations and kingdoms, they themselves are eventually punished by other tyrants. In the person of Sennacherib, the judgments of God are vividly depicted by the Prophet Isaiah in the tenth chapter of his prophecy. The Lord stirs up the king of the Assyrians to punish the eastern people. Sennacherib was a wicked man, and he associated with wicked people. He cruelly oppressed the people of God and plundered nearly all of Palestine, besieging Jerusalem, the chief city of that country. Thus says God concerning him through the Prophet in that place: "O Ashur, the rod of My wrath and the staff in their hands is My indignation: I will send him to a dissembling nation, and I will give him a charge against the people of My wrath, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them underfoot like the mire of the street. But he thinks not so, neither does his heart esteem it so," and so forth. A little later, the Prophet says, "But when the Lord has accomplished all His work upon Mount Zion and Jerusalem, I will visit the fruit of the proud heart of the King of Ashur, and his glorious and proud looks. Because he said, 'By the power of mine own hand have I done it, and by my

wisdom because I am wise." Afterward, the Prophet asks, "Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith?"

If Pompey had contemplated this example, as presented by the Prophet, he might have been better occupied and instructed than by his discussions with Cratippus. This would have taught him that although the Lord allows tyrants to be a plague to nations for a time, He eventually punishes them through other tyrants, giving them the same measure they meted out to others. Now, if we compare Sennacherib and Pompey, who gloried in the title "The Great," which Sulla bestowed upon him for his victories, we shall find many similarities in their histories. Both of them were instruments in the hand of God to strike the people of the East. Both of them destroyed Palestine and afflicted the people of God. Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem, and Pompey took it. Sennacherib was put to flight by an angel and was killed in his temple, his sanctuary, by his own sons. Pompey was defeated by Caesar and, after fleeing to Ptolemy King of Egypt, with whom he had restored to the throne, was miserably slain there. The ways of God's judgments are unfathomable. What Micah says of the Chaldeans in the fourth chapter of his prophecy, "They know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither understand they His counsel; therefore they shall be thrashed as sheaves in the barn," may be applied to all these giants and proud tyrants who, because they do not know the counsel of the Lord, shall, in His appointed time, bear the punishment of their pride.

The Holy Ghost does not teach us that only the wicked are punished but that the Church of God is also afflicted, albeit for a different purpose. Many reasons can be presented to explain why the Church of God endures so many calamities, but I will mention only three at this time, by which we can understand that the Lord, in truth and justice, exercises His church with afflictions. The first is that, as long

as we carry this burden of corruption within us, we are not only prone to sin but also continually provoke the Lord to deal with us justly by our sins. Therefore, it is in line with God's justice that He chastens us with a fatherly rod to keep us obedient. We must all say, as Jeremiah does in the third chapter of his Lamentations, verse 22, "It is the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed because His compassions fail not."

My second reason is this: It is best for us to be humbled under the mighty hand of God. We know how fierce and haughty-minded we are by nature, so it is necessary for God to keep us under His schooling and maintain some awe over us. Therefore, David says in Psalm 119, verse 67, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray: but now I keep thy word," and in verse 71, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn thy statutes."

The third reason is delivered by Paul in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, Chapter 11, verse 32: "When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, because we would not be condemned with the world." Therefore, let us conclude this entire discussion with Moses' words: "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous." Let us not measure them according to our own deceitful conceptions and judgments. Instead, let us understand that the godly are punished for the sins they daily commit to humble them and prevent their perishing with the wicked. God, in punishing the wicked, displays and opens the treasures of His longsuffering, patience, and justice. But when He afflicts us, He makes us more like His own Son, Christ, and stirs up in us an earnest desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ.

In the meantime, let us dedicate ourselves to heartfelt and earnest prayers, praying continually with the Saints of God.

"Come Lord JESUS, yea come quickly, Amen. Amen."

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