



Divine Providence

FaithBuilder 4 | Lesson 14 | Divine Providence

Lesson Overview

1. Read

Read about the Divine providence. Adapted from a talk by Rev. Douglas Taylor. pp. 1-2

2. Discuss

Choose a few reading questions to discuss, p. 3

3. Take Home

Choose a quote about Divine providence for reflection, p. 3

New Church Concept Divine Providence

When the Lord is with someone, He leads him and makes provision so that all that happens, whether sad or joyful, may bring him what is good. This is Divine Providence. *Arcana Coelestia* 6303

Peace has in it confidence in the Lord, that He directs all things, and provides all things, and that He leads to a good end.... *Arcana Coelestia* 8455

Read*

How is the Lord involved in our world? How does He govern it? How does He provide what is needed?

The way the Lord rules and provides is called the Divine Providence, which means the rule or government of Divine love and wisdom. Just as the Lord, when He created the universe, acted from His Divine love by means of His Divine wisdom, so He keeps creation in a state of order from His Divine love by means of His Divine wisdom. What His Divine love intends to do, His Divine wisdom provides the means of doing. He provides the means for keeping creation in order, and for restoring order when disorder breaks out.

Human beings *alone* are free to depart from the order of life intended for them. They are the only created beings who can get out of order. Plants and animals, the lower orders of creation, are permanently in the order of their life, the order into which they were created.

What Is the Lord's Goal for Us?

The order of life intended for human beings is that we should love the Lord first and our neighbor as ourselves. The two great commandments show us how to be truly human. But, unlike plants and animals, we can get out of that order and come into disorder. So the Lord works to provide what is needed to keep us in order, and to restore us to order when we depart from it. The Divine Providence is directed above all to the human race, and to other things for the sake of the human race because the main goal that the Lord has in view is a heaven from the human race.

We can understand this better if we consider what saying that the Lord is love itself and wisdom itself means. Divine love has three characteristics: it wills that there be others outside of itself, who have nothing of Divinity; it strives to work in conjunction with those outside of itself and not be at odds with them; and, finally, it wills to make them eternally happy. The Divine love is not content to make others happy temporarily; it can be satisfied only when people are eternally happy or blessed.

On the other hand the Divine wisdom—or way of operating—supplies the *means* of there being others outside of the Divine who have no Divinity or Infinity; it provides the means of being conjoined with those others; and it provides the means of

* Adapted from a talk by Rev. Douglas Taylor

making them eternally happy. The Divine wisdom, then, is the way the Divine love works or operates.

On the physical plane we see hundreds of examples of the Divine love operating by means of its wisdom. The various ways the Lord's love works in nature are usually called the *laws* of nature, but they are really the Lord's laws on the plane of nature. But what is a law? Isn't it a description of the way things work? Isn't the law of gravity a description of what happens when objects fall?

How Are Spiritual Laws Like the Laws of the World?

On the spiritual plane the Lord operates according to laws as well, laws of Divine Providence. He describes them in the Writings for the New Church. These laws were revealed because many believe that the Lord's Providence is changeable—that God can be swayed if we beg him. Misfortunes that happen can be either blessings or curses, and how we see them depends not on the experiences themselves but on our attitude towards them. If we only look at disappointments or failures from the point of view of the world they seem to be curses. But if we think of them as a means to our salvation from selfishness and worldliness, as opportunities to look to the Lord, as means by which the Lord prepares us for heaven, then they can be turned into blessings and *eternal* good can come from them.

How Does the Lord Guard Our Freedom?

But just what this eternal good is in particular can be known only by the Lord. "My thoughts are not your thoughts—neither are your ways My ways says the Lord." We are not permitted to know the details of the Lord's ways because then we would without doubt rebel against them and pervert the workings of Providence. We would also lose our freedom, and feeling of self-determination—and the Lord never permits us to lose these.

We Can See the Lord at Work by Looking at the Past

Yet we can see something of Providence *after* events have passed, by hindsight—if we look for them. Moses was not allowed to see the Lord's face, but was allowed to see His back. Similarly we may see Providence in the past, but not in the present. We can all recall experiences or actions we wish had never happened, but our regret and actual repentance, the change of our life, are of the Divine Providence. They are the spiritual and eternal good that come out of them. At the time we could see nothing of this, for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are the Lord's ways higher than our ways, and His thoughts higher than our thoughts.

New Church Concept Divine Providence

Divine providence is over-all, that is, it is present within the smallest details of all, and that people in the stream of providence are being carried along constantly towards happier things, whatever appearance the means may present. Those in the stream of providence are people who trust in the Divine and ascribe everything to Him. But those not in the stream of providence are people who trust in themselves alone and attribute everything to themselves; theirs is a contrary outlook, for they take providence away from the Divine and claim it as their own. It should be recognized also that to the extent that anyone is in the stream of providence he is in a state of peace; and to the extent that anyone is in a state of peace by virtue of the good of faith, he is in Divine providence. *Arcana Coelestia* 8478.4

It is granted to a person to see the Divine Providence in the back and not in the face; and this in a spiritual state and not in a natural state. To see the Divine Providence in the back and not in the face is to see it after it operates and not before. And to see it from a spiritual state and not from a natural state is to see it from heaven and not from the world. All who receive influx from heaven and acknowledge the Divine Providence, and especially those who by reformation have become spiritual, when they see events in some wonderful series, see the Divine Providence. See *Divine Providence* 187

Discuss

Choose questions for discussion.

1. What questions did the reading bring up for you?
2. What are the implications of animals and people being created differently?
3. In what ways are the laws of nature similar to the laws of Divine providence?
4. Describe how Divine providence works in your own words.
5. How might you share with a friend the importance of knowing that God is always leading each person?
6. Imagine the consequences of being forced to go to heaven. Why is human freedom so important?
7. Under what circumstances might a person see Divine providence in action?

Quotation Cards

Cut out these cards. Take a look at a quotation each day and think about how it applies to your life.

<p>The Lord turns Himself to those who trust in Him. Psalm 37:3</p>	<p>Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass.... Psalm 37:5</p>
<p>Those who trust in the Divine are not anxious, let alone worried, when they give thought to the morrow. See Arcana Coelestia 8455</p>	<p>Peace hold within itself trust in the Lord, the trust that He governs all things, and that He leads towards an end that is good. See Arcana Coelestia 8544</p>
<p>Those in the stream of providence are people who trust in the Divine and ascribe everything to Him. See Arcana Coelestia 8478.4</p>	<p>For those who trust in the Divine, all things are moving towards an everlasting state of happiness, no matter what happens to them. See Arcana Coelestia 8478.3</p>
<p>He who trusts in the Lord, Mercy shall surround him. Psalm 32:10</p>	<p>Those who trust in the Divine, remain even-tempered whether or not they realize their desires and do not grieve over loss. They are content with their lot. See Arcana Coelestia 8478.3</p>