

The Providence of God

by Dougan Clark

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a life of holiness, characterized by a joyful acceptance of and complete harmony with the providence of God.

Scripture: Psalm 37:3, Proverbs 3:5, Isaiah 26:3, Romans 8:28, Philippians 4:6

Topics: "Gods Providence", "Spiritual Obedience"

Description

Dougan Clark preaches on the outer life of holiness, emphasizing the importance of joyful acceptance and harmony with God's providence, leading to a life of habitual obedience to conscience guided by revelation. He highlights the significance of aligning with God's will and laws of Providence, akin to a seed planted in the soil of God's providence, yielding much fruit. Clark stresses the rest found in God, the true center of spiritual reasoning, where doubts are removed, fears are cast out, and perfect peace is experienced by trusting in God.

Transcript

The outer life of holiness is characterized by a joyful acceptance of and complete harmony with the providence of God. "Providence," says Dr. Upham, "is God's arrangement of things and events in the world, including His constant supervision. The law is the rule of action which is contained in, and which is developed from, this providential arrangement." Now what we want to enforce at present is that the holy man does constantly and willingly regulate his life by the law of Providence. If the law of Providence requires him to do a thing, however unpleasant it may be to him as a natural man he does it. If the law of Providence forbids him to do a thing, however desirable it may be to him as a natural man, he does it not. And the obedience which he yields to this unalterable and inviolable law is a prompt, ready and willing obedience. As he is united to, and in harmony with God in faith, in knowledge, in love, in will, so is he also united to and in harmony with the laws of Providence, and as the little seed, which is planted in the earth, remains quietly in its place and in its allotment, in order that it may germinate, and grow, and blossom and bear fruit -- so the sanctified man, planted in the soil of God's providence, abides quietly in his place, in order that he may bring forth "much fruit" to the glory of the Great Husbandman.

The outer life of holiness is a life of habitual obedience to the monitions of conscience. The great purpose of the holy man is to have always, like Paul, "a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men." All men have a conscience, because there is none so low or degraded that he has no sense of duty, no conviction deeply seated in his innermost nature, that he ought to do some things, and ought not to do

other things. Conscience is a witness for God deeply implanted in the soul of man. It takes cognizance of the moral world as the eye takes cognizance of the material world. It forces upon all men the conviction that there is such a thing as right and such a thing as wrong. It gives, as it were, an approving smile when we do what we believe or know to be right, and follows us with its lashings and scourgings when we do what we believe or know to be wrong. Some men, alas, know little or nothing of conscience save by its condemnation of their evil conduct. How much better to know it by its approval of right conduct.

But while conscience, as an inward monitor, is perpetually urging us to do what we believe to be right and to avoid what we believe to be wrong, it does not tell what is right or wrong. That must be learned from sources external to ourselves, from education, from the judgment, and especially from revelation. A man may do a thing conscientiously which is neither right nor proper to be done. He may conscientiously deprive himself of a thing which God has not at all forbidden him to enjoy. As an illustration of the first, look at the bloody persecutions in the past ages for the crime of heresy. As an illustration of the second note how a Roman Catholic will abstain from meat on Friday, however great may be his hunger. And a priest or clergyman of the same Church must abstain from marriage -- though neither the meat in the one case, nor the marriage in the other, has been prohibited by Divine commandment.

Conscience is like the eye -- revelation, either direct through the Spirit or mediate through the Holy Scriptures is like the light. The eye would do so little good without the light, and on the other hand the light would fall upon us to no purpose, without the eye. The light from the sun is always pure and good, but the eyes may be diseased, or distorted or blind; and if such be the case the vision will be imperfect or impaired, or lost. We may see things out of their proper shape, and out of their proper relation. We may mistake one object for another, as the one who saw men as trees walking, or, we may fail to see at all. But, O, when the eye is right, then the light from heaven, falling upon it, reveals a world of beauty in flower and bird, and river and landscape; and glancing upward we behold other worlds also, each and all proclaiming the glory of the Great Creator.

In like manner the conscience may be permeated by false teaching or misconception of the true, it may be deadened by sin, it may even be seared as with a hot iron -- and thus our moral judgments be greatly at fault, or we may even come to the point of calling evil good, and good evil like the arch-adversary when, as Milton puts it, he exclaimed, "Evil be thou my good." Now revelation falls upon the conscience like the beautiful sunlight upon the eye. And when the eye is right, that is to say, when the conscience is right, then how glorious it is to walk in the light, to behold the beauty of holiness, to look abroad upon the moral universe, and to realize that it, also, like the material, reflects the glory of the Infinite God. Therefore, beloved, carry the Bible everywhere, that the light of revelation, may fall upon the benighted consciences of men; and they, learning to act conscientiously, with the open Bible before them, may be enabled to do not only what they think is God's will, but what is God's will.

To sum up the whole subject of the inner and outer life of holiness, we may say, in conclusion, that it is a life of rest from fleshly reasonings. The holy man finds a rest from his perplexities in the bosom of Him who is the infinite Reason. He need no longer question nor hesitate, nor wonder why -- since he has found his true center in God, and revolving in joyous confidence around the center, his spiritual reasonings are put at rest, his spiritual doubts are removed and his spiritual wants satisfied. For two thousand years the world believed in the Ptolemaic system of astronomy. The earth was the center of all the heavenly bodies revolved around it. But having adopted the wrong center for the solar system, astronomers were always running across perplexities and doubts which they could not overcome. Numerous questions arose which they could not answer. Again and again they would observe a phenomenon which they could not explain.

But when the Copernican system was accepted, and the sun instead of the earth was made the center, then all these questions were solved, and all doubts were removed, and all these phenomena were explained. So in the spiritual world the man whose center is wrong -- the man who is revolving around self instead of God, is evermore doubting, and questioning and reasoning but when he finds his true center then he rests from all reasonings which are not of God.

He is no longer disturbed by the reproofs and scourgings of a guilty conscience, for conscience is on his side and smiles upon him. He is no longer troubled by unquiet fears, for perfect love has cast out fear, and "he shall not be afraid of evil tidings." He no longer places himself in conflict with God or with His providences. In the daily events of his lifetime he sees with the eye of faith that the Father's hand is ever upon him, whether in joy or sorrow, and that behind it is the wideness of the Father's love. The anxieties and fatigues of toil, whether with hand or brain, no longer afflict or discourage him. While he may work ever so hard, he rests also at the same time in the Father's will. He no longer suffers from the fear of poverty or want, for what he lacks the Father's bountiful hand supplies. And his promises extend to old age and to hoary hairs, and to the valley of the shadow of death. He enjoys a measure of the infinite tranquility of God; he is quiet and calm in spirit; he experiences perfect peace because he trusts in God. And this heavenly peace is both inward in the soul and outward in the countenance and in the life.

Such souls, indwelt by the blessed Holy Spirit, are the true kingdom of God. He rules in them and over them. They worship Him and reflect His glory. Praise the Lord!

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