

# A Firm Trust in God's Fatherly Hand

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**Bible Text:** Romans 5:3-6  
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Our Scripture reading this morning is found in the book of Romans. We read Romans 5, the entire chapter.

1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: 2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; 4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope: 5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. 6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. 8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. 10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. 11 And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. 12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: 13 (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. 15 But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. 16 And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. 17 For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) 18 Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even

so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. 19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. 20 Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: 21 That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

That far we read in God's holy inspired word. May God bless that word to our hearts.

In connection with Lord's Day 10 that we consider this morning, we read Romans 5:3-6, the verses that the Catechism uses to support the teaching in Lord's Day 10. Romans 5:3-6,

3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; 4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope: 5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. 6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

We turn then to Lord's Day 10, Questions and Answers 27 and 28. The Catechism continues its treatment of that first article, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." Lord's Day 10, Question and Answer 27,

Q. 27. What dost thou mean by the providence of God?

The almighty and everywhere present power of God; whereby, as it were by His hand, He upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, and all things come, not by chance, but by His fatherly hand.

Q. 28. What advantage is it to us to know that God has created, and by His providence doth still uphold all things?

That we may be patient in adversity; thankful in prosperity; and that in all things, which may hereafter befall us, we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father, that nothing shall separate us from His love; since all creatures are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move.

Beloved congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ, the doctrine of God's providence surely ranks among the most comforting doctrines of Scripture and we would be hard pressed to find many doctrines that yield so rich dividends to God's people and yet amazing that people sometimes portray doctrine as irrelevant. Here is a doctrine that is imminently relevant to the child of God in this world. Every moment of our pilgrimage, no matter

where God brings us, no matter what circumstances, he brings upon us the doctrine of God's providence as instrumental to bring us comfort in this life. When you and I, beloved, feel the weight of the world pressing in upon us, remember God's fatherly hand is in that circumstance.

On Lord's Day 9, we saw that our confidence in God hinges upon the fact that we have a Father, we have a faithful heavenly Father, we have a God who is our Father for Christ's sake. We have personal confidence in our God because he has made himself our Father through Jesus Christ and then in that knowledge, we make a personal confession that, "He is my God and my Father," and therefore we rely on him for all of our salvation. Why do we have such confidence in him? Because our Father is able to work all things for our good and he is willing to work all things for our good. Now Lord's Day 10 takes us a step further and especially looks at the power of God in upholding and governing all the creation for our sakes, governing the creation by his providence, and the fact that the writers of the Catechism would spend so much time speaking of this doctrine, beloved, shows the importance of it in our lives.

Romans 5 points us to the doctrine of God's providence as well when it speaks of God working through tribulation to bring us patience, and patience working experience, and experience working hope. That's providence. Tribulation, that pressure that comes upon us in the situations of life, trouble that inflicts distress and oppression and trial, how is it that you and I can glory in tribulations? How is it that we can rejoice in those circumstances? Because we know God's fatherly hand in that.

So we want to consider that, the truth of Scripture under that theme "A Firm Trust in God's Fatherly Hand." Let's note in the first place what that fatherly hand is; secondly, its far reach; and then lastly our great advantage. A firm trust in God's fatherly hand.

Beloved, when we talk about God's fatherly hand in creation, we understand God's providence. Providence is connected, the word "providence" is connected to the word "provide," and essential students, you will remember that the word "provide" comes from the two Latin words "pro," meaning "before," and "video," pro-video, "seeing beforehand." "Providence" literally means "a seeing beforehand; foresight." And now if we talked about a person who had much foresight, we would say that person acted upon what they saw beforehand; they wanted to achieve a certain goal but they saw beforehand what would be necessary to achieve that goal, they had foresight. That's the idea also of providence.

If we say somebody had great foresight, they saw the things that they needed to achieve in order to obtain a goal, a mother wants to feed her family so in order to achieve that goal she has the foresight to go to the store and buy that which she needs to obtain in order to feed her family. Well, in a similar way God sees beforehand all the circumstances that you and I face in this world but more than just seeing beforehand, it's not just knowing beforehand but also having a certain goal that he wants to achieve in those things and he understands all the means that are at his disposal and he uses those means in order to accomplish his goals and purposes. That's his providence. He makes

plans. Before the foundation of the world, God made plans for each and every one of his children and he is setting out to take us through our earthly pilgrimage all the way to heavenly glory. He has all the pathway planned out in his providence to bring us each to our heavenly destination.

So two aspects especially stand out about God's providence. In the first place, providence involves God's eternal counsel and decree. God's providence, in other words, has a goal in mind. It's not simply a ruling over things without any goal whatsoever. Far from it, all of God's providence is rooted in his goal that he has made in Jesus Christ to gather a people for himself, to bring honor and glory to himself. He has a plan that he wants to achieve.

That's the first aspect of God's providence, but then the second aspect of God's providence involves the actual execution of that plan. God works through all the circumstances in all of history beginning in his creation, creating the heavens and the earth in the garden; putting the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden; decreeing that Adam and Eve would fall in order to make room for Jesus Christ, in order to pave the way, as it were, for God's glorious purposes in Jesus Christ. He works all things after the counsel of his own will. He works. That's his providence, his decrees and his plan and his goal. He works those two aspects of God's providence.

What is the goal of God in all of the creation, in all of his governing? Our salvation in Jesus Christ, to bring glory to himself through Jesus Christ. That's why Jesus Christ came into the world. That's why he died for us even though we were sinners, because God had a goal. Not just a goal to save us from the wrath to come but a goal to bring us into covenant fellowship with himself through the blood of Jesus Christ.

That's how the apostle began the chapter that we read, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Peace with God, fellowship with God. God accomplishes his goal in the creation by his fatherly hand, that hand of our Father, the hand of him who is our Father for Christ's sake; that hand that upholds and governs the whole creation, upholds the creation, keeps it in existence. But then he does not simply keep it in existence as the deist would say, the one who says God created all things, he wound up the clock of creation, as it were, and allowed it to run by itself, that's not the God of Scripture. No, the God of Scripture is the God who upholds the creation in existence and works in that creation governing the creation for his purposes.

"Who knoweth not," Job says, "in all these things that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this? In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind." God's providence as far as you and I are concerned, beloved, God's providence is his fatherly hand as it reaches out to us. How far does God's fatherly hand reach? Does his providence reach only into a few circumstances of our lives? Into those great and weighty circumstances? If that's how we saw God's providence, maybe we would say, yes, God providentially rules and brings a husband to a wife into their life, or he keeps us in his providence from injury or death in a particular accident but, beloved, if we see

God's providence as limited only to a few instances, we miss so much of the comfort of his providence.

There are those, beloved, who would say that God providentially does not rule over the difficulties. They would say God rules and brings something good into my life, but when something difficult comes, when the death of a loved one strikes or when I lose my job or when I face some other kind of pain or affliction, they would say God has nothing to do with that. But if God does not have anything to do with that, beloved, if God is not in control over those things, how can we have comfort in those circumstances? The problem with that kind of view of God's providence is that it ends up taking almost everything out of God's hands and then it turns God into a helpless God who is not able to accomplish his will every time he wants to accomplish his will. He does his best but certain things, they would say, are simply beyond the control of our heavenly Father. He can try to fix them but he's not always able.

That portrayal, beloved, makes God weak and helpless. Sometimes he wins and sometimes he loses and then we're simply thinking of God in terms of how we see human beings, sometimes we are able to do things, sometimes we're not. Beloved, that's not how God is portrayed in Scripture. Thankfully Scripture portrays our God as the God of providence who upholds and governs all things by his fatherly hand. The God of the Bible is the God whose fatherly hand reaches in every single corner of the universe. There is not one thing in the whole of creation that escapes the upholding and governing of God's fatherly hand. He sees everything beforehand, he has his goals beforehand, and he guides all things by that same fatherly hand, according to that wisdom that is his. He declares the end from the beginning and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, and God says, "My counsel shall stand. I will do all my pleasure."

God rules by his providence. Isaiah says about this God, he calls "a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country." How does that happen? Well, because God speaks it and he brings it to pass. He purposes it in his heart, in his counsel, and he also performs that which he has planned. God does whatever he desires to do, when he desires to do it, by whatever means he wants to do it.

There's nothing, beloved, that is beyond the reach of God's fatherly hand. The Catechism lists all those things. He rules over rain and drought. He caused the sun to rise upon us this morning. He rules over fruitful and barren years, over the provision of meat and drink. He rules over our sickness and our health. He rules over riches and poverty. Yea, and all creatures. Everything is in God's fatherly hand from the sun that rules the day, to those tiny bacteria and viruses that make us sick.

All creatures are so in his hand that they cannot even stir unless God wills it. People whom God places in our path are also in God's fatherly hand. Circumstances that you and I face in our lives are in God's fatherly hand. That goes, then, for all manner of tribulations as the Apostle Paul mentions those in Romans 5. Those things are in God's hands. Tribulations literally refer to afflictions, oppressions, those things that press down

upon us that weigh us down. Those afflictions come into your life and mine, beloved, by God's fatherly hand.

Why does God send those afflictions? The apostle relates that. We could simply just say God brings those afflictions and leave it at that but the inspired apostle goes further, he wants us to know why does God bring those tribulations, because he has a plan to work in us patience. Not only so but we glory in tribulations also knowing that tribulation worketh patience. Not all by itself, of course. It's not as if tribulation had a power all of its own but God works through that tribulation to bring patience. The Spirit working in our hearts uses that tribulation pressing down upon us in our pilgrimage to teach us how to remain under. That's the idea of patience, the literal idea, remaining under God's way for us.

God uses tribulation to teach us. That's not natural, beloved, patience is not natural. The patience of which the apostle speaks, that's not just a natural patience that is worked in every single man, woman and child when they face afflictions, this is talking about a spiritual patience that the Spirit of God works in our hearts. He makes us, the Spirit does, makes us willing to walk in the way of suffering, willing to endure that tribulation. We would never be willing to endure those things apart from the work of the Spirit in our hearts.

The Spirit works patience in us because he teaches us that all these things are working, we heard that last week, all these things are working for our good. Then, beloved, when the Spirit works patience in us, he uses that patience to work experience. We see, and this is the idea of experience, we see our faith tried and shown to be true by experience, it is a tried faith, and then that experience works hope. The apostle began in that section speaking of hope. He says in verse 2, "By whom also," that is, by Jesus Christ, "By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." There is a hope for the future glory of God. Where does that hope, on what is it based, where does it come from? It's based in Jesus Christ.

By him we have that hope of the glory to come and the apostle begins with that hope, he moves to speak of tribulation, "not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience," God uses to work in us "hope." He gives to us that we would look forward. Hope is a looking forward, looking forward to the glory that he has in store for us. He works in us hope that is not only a looking forward but also a certainty. It's not, "Well, maybe it will happen, maybe it won't. I hope it does." It's not that kind of hope but he works in us a certainty and then that looking forward is a longing, a reaching for the glorious future that our heavenly Father has for us.

God's fatherly hand, beloved, brings us tribulations. The devil will tempt us when tribulations and afflictions come. The devil will say, "Your Father has deserted you," but here we find just the opposite, when those afflictions come, they have come by God's fatherly hand. Our Father has not deserted us but he comes in his love even in those tribulations.

The doctrine, beloved, of God's providence, then, is of great advantage to us because it gives us a right perspective in all the things that you and I face, and is that not like a pair of eyeglasses? Take those of us who don't have so good eyes, take those eyeglasses off and everything is blurry. We're not able to read and make sense of the black on white that lies before us, but if we put those eyeglasses on, the eyeglasses of Scripture, the eyeglasses of this doctrine, then we can begin to make sense of it. Then the black marks turn into beautiful poetry and give meaning to the ink that we see, and having that perspective, we can be patient because we know that these things have come by God's fatherly hand no matter what the hardship is, beloved.

We heard that again last week, there's nothing that can separate us from the love of God which is ours in Christ Jesus. Christ's love for his people never changes. Nothing can destroy it. Nothing can get in the way of him manifesting that love towards us. Now think of God's desire to manifest that love. If he had such a desire to show his love that he sent his only begotten Son, if that's the degree to which he loved us, and it is, then is there anything, beloved, that would get in the way of God pouring out that love upon us also today?

The love of Christ pursues us and that makes us, I say, patient in adversity because it must be for our good. Then I think of the examples of Scripture. How many examples, beautiful examples of God's children who experienced great afflictions and yet Scripture shows that was indeed for good. Joseph says to his brothers, Genesis 50:20, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." God had a great purpose. Now we don't see always, in fact often we don't see but it's always true. God had and has a great purpose. What about David when Shimei cursed him? 2 Samuel 16:10, "the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? so let him curse, because the LORD hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?" David saw that was part of God's providence to humble him.

Patience in adversity but then also thankful in prosperity. The knowledge of God's providence makes us thankful in prosperity because, beloved, the more God reminds us of his providential rule in good times, the more thankful we will be. Then we will say, "I did not deserve these things. These things come to me by God's providence. He gave them to me anyway and it wasn't my wisdom ultimately that obtained this or that for me, it wasn't my strength but God brought these things in his providence. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above," is our confession. Those things come down from the Father of lights in whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. When God shows us that, beloved, that all the provisions that he gives us come to us by his fatherly hand, then we give thanks to him.

Thankful in prosperity but now one step further. We said patience in adversity, thankful in prosperity, the Apostle Paul in Romans goes a step further, I say, when he says we glory in tribulations. Now we are thankful, even rejoice in tribulations exactly because of the truth of the fatherly hand of God. We are able to rejoice, to glory in tribulations, that's

what the inspired apostle says. Not only so, but we glory in tribulations. It might have been easier, beloved, if the apostle had given an admonition and we would say to ourselves, "Well, that's completely out of reach." But he simply states a fact, this is what God's children do.

That's strong language, we confidently boast, we rejoice in tribulations, maybe not consciously but, beloved, when God gives to us the new life of Jesus Christ in our heart of hearts, there is a rejoicing in tribulations. According to the new man, there is a rejoicing in tribulations. How can that be? Is it rejoicing because we look at those tribulations and we say to ourselves, "I love to experience tribulations"? Of course not. Not because of tribulations in themselves, not because we love suffering, not because either that we simply harden ourselves and ignore those tribulations like the Stoic might do. Why do we glory in tribulations? Because of the fruit that God by his fatherly hand is working through those tribulations. That's why the apostle says it, we rejoice in those tribulations because we know the good fruit that will come through those tribulations as a bitter medicine. A person sick in bed who cannot even get out of bed because of his sickness rejoices in that bitter medicine because he knows the fruit that will come. We rejoice in tribulations.

Do you see, beloved, the great comfort of the doctrine of God's providence? When God shows to us that all the things we experience are being brought to us by his fatherly hand, then there is comfort. There is no amount of trust that we would place in our faithful Father, there is no amount of trust that is misplaced when we place it in God our Father. "Commit thy way," says the psalmist, "Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him and he shall bring it to pass." Amen.

*Our Father which art in heaven, give to us, we pray, the faith that we would see thy fatherly hand always in our circumstances, even thou dost chastise us but also in prosperity. Whatever circumstances thou dost bring into our lives, show to us, we pray, thy fatherly hand. Forgive us, O Lord, when we doubt thy goodness to us. Lead and guide us, we pray, all the days of our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*