



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for the Eighth Sunday after Trinity

(Book of Common Prayer)

O God whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and on earth: We humbly beseech thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This is another prayer that can be traced back to the Gelasian Sacramentary via the Sarum Mass. Translated into English from the original Latin for the 1549 Prayer Book, it began *"God whose providence is never deceived"*. This was altered in 1662 to the current wording, which is a more accurate rendering.

The "hurtful things" include anything which damages our relationship with God and with our neighbour. Conversely "those things which be profitable for us" include anything which benefits our lives before God and which sustains us in our care for our neighbour.

God, to whom this prayer for protection and support is made, is the one whose "providence ordereth all things". The way in which providence does this has been explored in various ways in Christian history. There is for example God's creative activity, as recounted in Genesis. And there is the sustaining activity of God as he upholds human beings, as referred to in several passages of Scripture, for example Isaiah 41:10: *"I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness"*.

The term "general providence" has been used to refer to God working in and through the natural order, as when he makes the rain to fall on both the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). This contrasts with what has been labelled "special providence", as when God speaks through a prophet or operates through a particularly significant action.

However, at the Reformation the notion of "universal providence" came to the fore, especially through the teaching of Jean Calvin (1509-1564). According to this interpretation of providence, God is in direct control of every event, including every human thought and action. The problem with universal providence is that it leaves no room for human responsibility and free will.

The main contours of New Testament indicate that the way in which God governs all things leaves room for our responses and our own personal engagement. Through God's loving providence we have the capacity to undergo interior change. We have the ability to grow in faith and love by virtue of God's giving us "those things which be profitable for us".

James Graham

July 2026