

Time and Chance

I once came across an article that said that “chance” was an evil idea that had no place in Christian theology. The author claimed that nothing ever happened by chance because God governs all things.

While I agree that God is sovereign, I do not believe that “chance” is a bad concept. The word “chance” does appear in the Bible, and the book of Ecclesiastes actually says that random chance has a significant impact on mankind:

Ecclesiastes 9:11: “I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; **but time and chance happeneth to them all.**”

It's true that in one sense there is no such thing as chance. God does govern all things and His control is absolute. As the book of Proverbs points out, even things like the throw of dice are governed by God:

Proverbs 16:33: “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof **is of the Lord.**”

So, then, from *God's* perspective there is no such thing as chance. From our perspective, though, things are a bit different. When we “just happen” to meet an old friend in the supermarket, it may be true that the meeting was foreordained by God before the world began – but the fact remains that out of hundreds of trips to the store you only met your friend one time, and there is no good reason to believe that you will see him again in your next

visit.

When God looks into our future He sees certainties, but all we can see are probabilities. There is no good reason for me to believe that next time I go to church I will be attacked by a tiger or will find a \$500 bill lying on the ground; statistically speaking, neither of those events happen very often. If a cow happens to fall out of the sky and destroys my car while I am visiting a friend, we would say that I was “unlucky” because, statistically speaking, events like that are rare. The word “chance” is just a way to describe events that happen infrequently. It does not mean that God was unaware of the event or did not ordain it, but it does mean that we had no good reason to expect it to happen.

The point Ecclesiastes is making is that the fastest person does not always win the race and the strongest nation does not always win the battle. Sometimes unexpected things come up and the faster person loses to the slower one, or the weaker nation overcomes the stronger one. We like to think that the “best” person always wins, but that doesn't always happen. Sometimes a good manuscript is rejected while a bad manuscript is published. Sometimes the better candidate gets passed over for the job. Victory does not always go to the most deserving person, and the reason is because unexpected events can have a tremendous impact.

From our perspective there is a great deal of luck and chance involved in life. There may be two people who worked equally hard, but one of them might fail because they ran into an unusual setback that no one could have foreseen. Very rare and life-changing events (also known as “time and chance”) really do happen to us all, and they have a definite impact on our lives.

So do not be too hard on the word “chance”. It conveys a concept that is worth thinking about.