

Week Eight, November 10, 2022: Eternal Decree, Creation, Providence

WCF 3: God's Eternal Decree:

WCF 3:1: *God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass:(a) yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin,(b) nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.(c)*

(a)Eph 1:11; Rom 11:33; Heb 6:17; Rom 9:15,18. (b)James 1:13,17; 1 John 1:5. (c)Acts 2:23; Matt 17:12; Acts 4:27-28; John 19:11; Prov 16:33.

R.C. Sproul says if you deny this section, you're an atheist.⁵⁶ God has eternally ordained (or ordered⁵⁷) based on Him being eternal, unchangeable and independent. God is the beginning of all things, thus He is the cause of all things, even evil: see Isaiah 45:7 (also, Gen. 45:5-7; Pr. 16:4, 33). But He is not the "author" of (responsible for/does) of sin. Thomas Watson writes, "A musician plays upon a viol out of tune; the musician is the cause of the sound, but the jarring and discord is from the viol itself ..."⁵⁸ Acts 2:23 is helpful. Angels and men sin, but not outside God's eternal plan (predestination) and His execution of it (providence).⁵⁹ God uses second causes: Van Dixhoorn encourages us, "God has decided the end from the beginning, but the middle still matters. It still matters because God not only decides what will happen in the end, but how it will happen."⁶⁰ As well, "Scientists who deny the reality of God would have no work to do if it were not for the dependability of the 'second causes' established by God's decree."⁶¹ You will find "elect", "predestinated", "chosen", and "ordained" in the Bible, but never "free will". God has no plan B; it all is in one system.⁶² "God rules, not chance."⁶³ Neither fate, nor man.

WCF 3:2: *Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions, (d) yet hath He not decreed anything because He foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions.(e)*

(d)Acts 15:18; 1 Sam 23:11-12; Matt 11:21,23. (e)Rom 9:11, 13, 16, 18.

God's knowing is not dependent on the future (God is immanent in all our time). "Though God knows every possible conditional [scenario], every possible 'if ... then' statement, these conditionals

⁵⁶ R.C. Sproul, *Truths We Confess: A Layman's Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*, vol. 1 (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2006), 75.

⁵⁷ Van Dixhoorn, 44. God does not will in time, for He is eternal and unchangeable: David Dickson, 27.

⁵⁸ Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 75.

⁵⁹ Ibid, "God's decree ordains things that shall fall out, God's providence orders them." 119.

⁶⁰ Van Dixhoorn, Ibid.

⁶¹ Wayne Spear, *Faith of Our Fathers: A Commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith*, 24.

⁶² Hodge, *The Westminster Confession*, 64.

⁶³ Rowland Ward, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: A Study Guide*, 45.

do not influence him. He makes his decisions apart from them.”⁶⁴ This is not foreseeing, but decreeing forth: “... God foreknows only because He has pre-determined.”⁶⁵ “He does not choose us because he foresees that we will believe, but he foresees that we will believe, because he has chosen us.”⁶⁶ “The purpose of God is, with reference to all the objects embraced within it, certainly efficacious.”⁶⁷ Christ’s sacrifice is totally effective; no drop of His blood was spilled in vain.

WCF 3:3: *By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels(f) are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.(g)*

(f)1 Tim 5:21; Matt 25:41. (g)Rom 9:22-23; Eph 1:5-6; Prov 16:4.

WCF 3:4: *These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.(h)*

(h)2 Tim 2:19; John 13:18.

WCF 3:5: *Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, hath chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory,(i) out of His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto:(k) and all to the praise of His glorious grace.(l)*

(i)Eph 1:4, 9, 11; Rom 8:30; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 Thess 5:9. (k)Rom 9:11,13,16; Eph 1:4,9. (l)Eph 1:6, 12.

WCF 3:6: *As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath He, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereunto.(m) Wherefore they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ,(n) are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified,(o) and kept by His power through faith unto salvation.(p) Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.(q)*

(m)1 Pet 1:2; Eph 1:4-5; Eph 2:10; 2 Thess 2:13. (n)1 Thess 5:9,10; Tit 2:14. (o)Rom 8:30; Eph 1:5; 2 Thess 2:13. (p)1 Pet 1:5; (q)John 17:9; Rom 8:28-39; John 6:64-65; John 10:26; John 8:47; 1 John 2:19.

WCF 3:7: *The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy, as He pleaseth, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath, for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice.(r)*

(r)Matt 11:25-26; Rom 9:17-18,21-22; 2 Tim 2:19-20; Jude 4; 1 Pet 2:8.

⁶⁴ Van Dixhoorn, 47. He previously notes that God’s knowing what “could” happen was historically explained academically as “middle knowledge”, 46 (see also Fesko, 112-115).

⁶⁵ B.B. Warfield, “Predestination”, in *Biblical and Theological Studies*, 281. J.I. Packer explains, “Foreknow in Romans 8:29 (cf. 1 Pet. 1:2 and 1:20 ...) means ‘fore-love’ and ‘fore-appoint’: it does not express the idea of a spectator’s anticipation of what will spontaneously happen”, 39.

⁶⁶ G.I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: For Study Classes*, 32.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 67.

Election cannot be changed, but is within God's "secret counsel". It is of His free grace. God "foreordained all the means thereunto", and this includes providing the Scriptures and the Visible Church's means of grace. We are not hyper-calvinists: the Gospel should be promiscuously proclaimed everywhere as His chosen means to save His elect by Jesus Christ "freely offered to us in the Gospel" (SC 31).⁶⁸ Election and reprobation both are to glorify God in manifesting His mercy and justice respectively: "double predestination".⁶⁹ Only the elect are saved, because God has chosen only them in Christ before history, and He saves Whom He loves. God is never disappointed.

WCF 3:8: *The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care,(s) that men attending the will of God revealed in His Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. (t) So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God,(u) and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel.(w)*
(s)Rom 9:20; Rom 11:33; Deut 29:29. (t)2 Pet 1:10. (u)Eph 1:6; Rom 11:33. (w)Rom 11:5-6,20; 2 Pet 1:10; Rom 8:33; Luke 10:20

This doctrine is called "predestination", and it is "to be handled ... with special prudence and care", that is, to be given special attention as "praise and reverence and admiration of God"; As one of R.C. Sproul's professors said, "... all true theology begins and ends with doxology",⁷⁰ because for Christians it gives "certainty of their effectual vocation, being assured of their eternal election". It also should make you humbly serve Him: "... whenever we are called to present the precious truth of predestination, let us do so in a way that will elevate God in our minds, as we are mindful to humble ourselves in his sight."⁷¹ Election also motivates to evangelize: no pressure about results. "[In Eph. 2:10] Nothing is more noticeable than [Paul's] zeal in enforcing [Predestination's] two chief practical contents—the assurance it should bring to believers of their eternal safety in the faithful hands of God, and the ethical energy it should arouse within them to live worthily of their vocation."⁷² As well, God is *arbitrary* in His decree (relative to our inherent value), but not *capricious*, because He is a Person (thus, personal). All this reflects TULIP as a direct historical denial of Arminianism:

⁶⁸ This is a common accusation of those who deny "common grace" and "the well-meant offer" as will be discussed with assigned reading later on for chapter ten, "Of Effectual Calling".

⁶⁹ Warfield documents the lengthy debate on section 7, and concludes: "We must esteem the clear and firm statement of the doctrine of foreordination to death, therefore, a matter which the Assembly deemed of the highest importance." "The Making of the Westminster Confession, and Especially of Its Chapter On The Decree of God", in *The Westminster Assembly And Its Work*, 133.

⁷⁰ Sproul, 108. He adds, citing Rom. 11:33 as one of Paul's frequent doxological digressions, "... theological reflection should move our souls to worship and reverence", 109.

⁷¹ Van Dixhoorn, 52.

⁷² Warfield, "Predestination", *Biblical and Theological Studies*, 320.

The Canons of Dort
RATIFIED IN THE NATIONAL SYNOD OF THE REFORMED CHURCH
Held at Dordrecht in the years 1618 and 1619 (Source: BibleWorks)

The Decision of the Synod of Dort on the Five Main Points of Doctrine in Dispute in the Netherlands is popularly known as the Canons of Dort (or the Five Articles Against the Remonstrants) ...

The Synod of Dort was held in order to settle a serious controversy in the Dutch churches initiated by the rise of Arminianism. Jacob Arminius (1560-1609), a theological professor at Leiden University, departed from the Reformed faith on a number of important points. After Arminius's death, forty-three of his ministerial followers drafted and presented their heretical views to the States General of the Netherlands on five of these points in the Remonstrance of 1610. In this document and even more explicitly in later writings, the Arminians, who came to be called "Remonstrants," taught (1) election based on foreseen faith, (2) the universal merits of Christ, (3) the free will of man due to only partial depravity, (4) the resistibility of grace, and (5) the possibility of a lapse from grace. They desired the Reformed church's doctrinal standards to be revised and their own minority views to be protected by the government. The Arminian-Calvinism conflict ... led the Netherlands to the brink of civil war ... in 1617 the States General voted four to three to call a national Synod to address Arminianism.

The Synod held 154 formal sessions over a period of seven months (November 1618 to May 1619) ... Under the leadership of Johannes Bogerman, the Remonstrants were dismissed. The Synod then developed the Canons which thoroughly rejected the Remonstrance of 1610 and scripturally set forth the Reformed doctrine on these debated points, now popularly called "the five points of Calvinism" [TULIP]: unconditional election, limited atonement, total depravity, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of saints ... They may be summarized as follows: (1) Unconditional election and faith are sovereign gifts of God. (2) While the death of Christ is abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world, its saving efficacy is limited to the elect. (3,4) All are so totally depraved and corrupted by sin that they cannot effect any part of their salvation; in sovereign grace God irresistibly calls and regenerates the elect to newness of life. (5) Those thus saved God graciously preserves so that they persevere until the end, even though they may be troubled by many infirmities as they seek to make their calling and election sure. Simply stated, we may say that the subject matter of the Canons is: sovereign grace conceived, sovereign grace merited, sovereign grace needed and applied, and sovereign grace preserved ...

As Arminians are alive and well and not uncommonly passionate in defiance of Calvinism, Van Dixhoorn's words are worth sharing as we close this section (which sets up all that follows): "Few who question God's decrees have the patience to investigate the character of his holiness or the nature of our sin."⁷³ More positively, he also shares "God had our crown in view long before our creation"⁷⁴, and reminds us that the classic biblical chapters on the divine decrees are Romans 9 and Ephesians 1 (per other notes, on the booklet calling Calvinism "fatalism", Romans 9 is excluded).⁷⁵

⁷³ Van Dixhoorn, 49.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 51. A good quote to vindicate supralapsarianism (redemption the design of the creation and fall blueprints). While some deem the Standards teaching infralapsarianism, this does not seem plausible by the chosen phrases of the Standards. Green notes a "supralapsarian influence", 32.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

WCF 4: Of Creation: Thomas Watson writes, “The heavens are the most ancient records, where God has written his glory with a sunbeam . . .;”⁷⁶ “To imagine that the work of the creation was not framed by the Lord Jehovah, is as if we should conceive a curious landscape to be drawn without the hand of an artist.”⁷⁷ As well, “To create is proper to a Deity. Acts xvii 24. Plato was convinced of a Deity when he saw that all the world could not make a fly. Thus God proves himself to be the true God, and distinguishes himself from idols. Jer x II.”⁷⁸ And, “Every star in the sky, every bird that flies in the air, is a witness against the heathen. A creature could not make itself.”⁷⁹

WCF 4:1: *It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, (a) for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, (b) in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days; and all very good. (c)*

(a)Heb 1:2; John 1:2-3; Gen 1:2; Job 26:13; Job 33:4. (b)Rom 1:20; Jer 10:12; Ps 104:24; Ps 33:5-6. (c)Gen 1; Heb 11:3; Col 1:16; Acts 17:24.

Out of nothing (*Ex Nihilo*): God made the material. Space of six days: literal 24-hour periods (Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8 are figurative expressions; See Psalm 90:9, 12 for the difference). Literary structure in Genesis 1 does not mean it is not narrative, just that God is a God of order in how He laid out the earth and it’s creatures. The Westminster Divines would only have literal days in mind (1600s);⁸⁰ Charles Lyell and Charles Darwin changed thinking in the churches with their theories in the 1800s. Evolution is a farce. In the beginning was God. Not in the beginning was the cosmos. ALL GOOD!

WCF 4:2: *After God had made all other creatures, He created man, male and female, (d) with reasonable and immortal souls, (e) endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after His own image; (f) having the law of God written in their hearts, (g) and power to fulfil it: (h) and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change. (i) Beside this law written in their hearts, they received a command, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which while they kept, they were happy in their communion with God, (k) and had dominion over the creatures. (l)*

(d)Gen 1:27. (e)Gen 2:7 with Eccl 12:7 and Luke 23:43 and Matt 10:28. (f)Gen 1:26; Col 3:10; Eph 4:24. (g)Rom 2:14-15. (h)Eccl 7:29. (i)Gen 3:6; Eccl 7:29. (k)Gen 2:17; Gen 3:8-11, 23. (l)Gen 1:26, 28.

⁷⁶ Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 66.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 114.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 116.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ With this statement, it should be noted that Van Dixhoorn notes, “Some of the members of the assembly preferred to state that a little more precisely, saying that God made the world in six twenty-four hour days . . . In the end, for some reason, the Westminster assembly decided not to elaborate on the words of Scripture. In spite of the way in which some members specified in their own writings how long those days were, the assembly instead chose to highlight the conclusion of Scripture: that all of God’s creation was ‘very good’.” Van Dixhoorn, 61-62. Yet he provides no footnotes to demonstrate what the discussion was, and perhaps we should not read in an implication that anyone disagreed with a twenty-four hour understanding, but rather it was not questioned in their pre-Darwinian time. It would be interesting to explore this further, perhaps in Van Dixhoorn’s monumental, five-volume *Minutes* of the Westminster Assembly which he does footnote earlier surrounding such comments.

God's image is man and woman in their souls: knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness. Man's body is just a house. Thomas Watson writes, "The soul of man. This is the man of man."⁸¹ Man is not made in the image of God; He IS God's image. "Reasonable" = rational.⁸² "Immortal" = will always exist somewhere. They had the Law of God in their hearts at creation and were able to do the Law before the Fall; thus they were righteous and deserved to stay as long as they obeyed.⁸³ The command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is a special display of the Creator-creature distinction and their need to obey Him to live. Creation ordinances – Sabbath, marriage (and family and functional relations), work, and dominion, still apply after the Fall. Notice that male and female are "man" and equal in value (while different in designed function). Again, evolution is false: mankind is made immediately in God's image (and as fully developed adults)—they did not evolve from slime or apes. This holds up the value of humanity, and keeps them in their place: "Creatures are not an end in themselves; they manifest the glory of the One who made them."⁸⁴ Heed the warning of Romans 1:25 not to worship the creature rather than the Creator. Man only "devolved" after the Fall. "An evolutionary worldview lacks a truly scientific basis, and leads to despair. A worldview based on the Bible's teaching about creation leads to hope, and life with meaning and responsibility."⁸⁵ Also, as Ken Ham says, "I'm glad the Bible isn't a science text book. Science text books change every year!" Mankind, animal kind, and plant life all were made adult with their "kinds" to be able to reproduce, as they did with great DNA variation.

Mostly we should marvel in God meditating on His creation both massive and microscopic (Psalms 19, 139). Thomas Watson writes, "His wisdom is seen in marshaling and ordering everything in its proper place and sphere."⁸⁶

⁸¹ Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 115. See 2 Cor. 5. Watson also writes elsewhere, "The body is but a sheath; the soul is the princely part of man, which sways the scepter of reason ..." *The Ten Commandments* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 19. J. Gresham Machen, in *The Christian View of Man* (ch. 12, "God's Image in Man"), writes: "It was I many years ago, and it is the same I today, and it will be the same I to all eternity. That is what the Bible means when it tells me that I have a soul ... The 'image of God' cannot well refer to man's body, because God is a spirit; it must therefore refer to man's soul. It is man's soul which is made in the image or likeness of God." This is not to say that man does not exist as a psycho-somatic unity in this life and at the Resurrection, nor that the body is unimportant: on the contrary, the resurrection is insisted upon in 1 Cor. 15 as fundamental to our faith not being in vain. And Christ continues to have a body as well as a human soul as our Mediator. We are not teaching Gnosticism.

⁸² Illustrating another issue, B.B. Warfield in his, "The First Question of the Shorter Catechism", quotes numerous influential or contemporary catechisms constantly using phrases like, "Since thou art a rational creature, that is to say, a human being", equating humanity to rationality as a given. Such an elementary understanding of humanity is so buffeted today it is deemed worth noting here. (*The Westminster Assembly And Its Work*, 385-388.)

⁸³ Attention will be given to the happy communion they enjoyed with God as it relates to the Tree of Life later on. For now, Van Dixhoorn's comments intrigue us: "We do not know how long our first parents heeded this injunction, but we can be sure that while they did, they enjoyed fellowship with God ... So long as they honoured God, they enjoyed those blessings ...", 65-66.

⁸⁴ Spear, 29.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 32.

⁸⁶ Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 72.

WCF 5: Providence: (Against Deists, Rationalists, Pantheists)

WCF 5:1: *God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, (a) direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, (b) from the greatest even to the least, (c) by His most wise and holy providence, (d) according to His infallible foreknowledge, e and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, (f) to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy. (g)*
(a) Heb 1:3. (b) Dan 4:34-35; Ps 135:6; Acts 17:25-26,28; Job 38-41. (c) Matt 10:29-31. (d) Prov 15:3; Ps 104:24; Ps 145:17. (e) Acts 15:18; Ps 94:8-11. (f) Eph 1:11; Ps 33:10-11. (g) Isa 63:14; Eph 3:10; Rom 9:17; Gen 45:7; Ps 145:7.

WCF 5:2: *Although, in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first Cause, all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly: (h) yet, by the same providence, He ordereth them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently. (i)*
(h) Acts 2:23. (i) Gen 8:22; Jer 31:35; Exod 21:13 with Deut 19:5; 1 Kings 22:28,34; Isa 10:6-7.

Providence is God's means of "executing" (LC 14) the flow of His eternal decree in creation. "... this absolute control effects the execution of God's fixed plan ...".⁸⁷ His decree is the cause, and His providence its disposing by second causes (which He governs). As R.C. Sproul advises, "Some say the devil is in the details, but Christians should say that God is in the details."⁸⁸ He is in control of all things, great and small—from galaxies to cells and atoms, and makes them all to work in His created system. "God is the cause, providence the process and the will of God the explanation."⁸⁹ What is our proper response? "How great thou art!" See Psalm 104:1, 24, 31-35. We should complain less and wonder more (Rom. 11:33-36); stall less and more actively serve. "God's providence should lead the believer to be patient in adversity and thankful in prosperity, resting confidently in his Lord."⁹⁰ We must remember the Creator-creature distinction and submit to His rule rather than try and rule Him.⁹¹ God's providence and man's responsibility are two parallel truths of the same predestined track. It is important to explain that Calvinism or Determinism (Predestination) is not fatalism. Fatalism is the idea that things are inevitable, but without purpose or a plan (contrary to Eph. 1:11). Predestination is not a resigned sigh of passivity, but resolved commitment to covenantal responsibility (the "ought" is preserved). We do influence events, but

⁸⁷ G.I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: For Study Classes* (: Christian Focus Publications, 1964), 46.

⁸⁸ Sproul, 77.

⁸⁹ T. Jollie Smith, *Studies in Criticism and Revelation*, in *The Westminster Confession of Faith: A Study Guide*, Rowland Ward, 53.

⁹⁰ *Testimony in The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*, A-23.

⁹¹ "... continued dependence is inseparable from the idea of a creature." A.A. Hodge, *Ibid*, 93.

God sovereignly plans and directs them (contingency is related to this). Determinism believes the future is fixed by causality.⁹² So “contingency” (possibility) is often referred to by the Divines.⁹³

WCF 5:3: *God in his ordinary providence maketh use of means, (k) yet is free to work without, (l) above, (m) and against them, at His pleasure. (n)*
(k)Acts 27:31,44; Isa 55:10-11; Hos 2:21-22. (l)Hos 1:7; Matt 4:4; Job 34:20. (m)Rom 4:19-21. (n)2 Kings 6:6; Dan 3:27.

A distinction is made between ordinary providence (the way things generally happen, like the sun rising and setting daily as it was designed and set to do so in Genesis 1) and special providence (God freely “interrupting” at His good pleasure in mighty, miraculous acts of redemptive history, such as in Joshua 10:12-14). It is helpful to “distinguish between the ordinary and extraordinary operations of providence.”⁹⁴ Notice that this should not have been an effective trap in the Scopes Trials and the book *Inherit the Wind*. God can interrupt His general providence and yet hold the world together, just as there was light before there were luminaries in Genesis 1. God is El Shaddai. This phrase “ordinary providence” is a better way to explain certain things in theological discussions than is “common grace”, a phrase not found in our Standards.

WCF 5:4: *The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God so far manifest themselves in His providence, that it extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men; (o) and that not by a bare permission, (p) but such as hath joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, (q) and otherwise ordering and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to His own holy ends; (r) yet so, as the sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is, nor can be, the author or approver of sin. (s)*
(o)Rom 11:32-34; 2 Sam 24:1 with 1 Chron 21:1; 1 Kings 22:22-23; 1 Chron 10:4,13-14; 2 Sam 16:10; Acts 2:23; Acts 4:27-28. (p)Acts 14:16. (q)Ps 76:10; 2 Kings 19:28. (r)Gen 50:20; Isa 10:6-7,12. (s)James 1:13-14,17; 1 John 2:16; Ps 50:21.

The Fall was eternally decreed by God and thus is His providential work. He was not surprised and did not react. Evil and sin are not just permitted, but governed by God according to His plan and for His glory. But He does not sin: His creatures do according to their dependent and fallen nature.

WCF 5:5: *The most wise, righteous, and gracious God doth oftentimes leave for a season His own children to manifold temptations, and the corruption of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption, and deceitfulness of their*

⁹² These comments reflect meditation on what is argued against Calvinism as being fatalism (and satanic) per the disclaimer in the suggested sources below related to a booklet by the Creation Museum in Santee, CA. Pastor put notes on his old copy of this section, but as he typed them in for an updated version of the class (2014), he is not sure these are his original thoughts or words, but at this point would not be sure of his original source, if not.

⁹³ See the earlier footnote reference to Fesko’s detailed discussion. As well, this summary by Van Dixhoorn may be helpful: “Some [secondary] causes are necessary, some free, some contingent.” Referencing Jer. 31:35 for “necessary” causes, Exod. 21:3 with Deut. 19:5 for “free” causes, and 1 Kings 22:28, 34 for “contingent” causes, he writes: “It is important to understand that God had definitively decreed how each of these three events would turn out. But he also decided that the functioning of the solar system would be a necessary cause of the earth’s light, that men would be saved or lost by their choice of a city of refuge (a free cause), and that Micaiah’s integrity as a prophet would depend on Ahab’s death (a contingent cause)”, 71.

⁹⁴ Spear, 36.

hearts, that they may be humbled;(t) and, to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon Himself, and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for sundry other just and holy ends.(u)

(t)2 Chron 32:25-26, 31; 2 Sam 24:1. (u)2 Cor 12:7-9; Ps 73; Ps 77:1-12; Mark 14:66-72 with John 21:15-17.

This is probably one of the most often used sections of the Confession by pastor in counseling. It is very pastoral and helpful. God's providence toward the elect: He allows us to fall so that we learn and live closer to Him. What Satan would use for our ruin, God uses for our good. It's not an excuse to sin, but be consoled.

WCF 5:6: *As for those wicked and ungodly men whom God, as a righteous Judge, for former sins doth blind and harden,(w) from them He not only withholdeth His grace, whereby they might have been enlightened in their understandings, and wrought upon in their hearts;(x) but sometimes also withdraweth the gifts which they had,(y) and exposeth them to such objects as their corruption makes occasions of sin;(z) and, withal, gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and the power of Satan:a whereby it comes to pass that they harden themselves, even under those means which God useth for the softening of others.(b)*

(w)Rom 1:24,26,28; Rom 11:7-8. (x)Deut 29:4. (y)Matt 13:12; Matt 25:29. (z)Deut 2:30; 2 Kings 8:12-13. (a)Ps 81:11-12; 2 Thess 2:10-12. (b)Exod 7:3 with Exod 8:15,32; 2 Cor 2:15-16; Isa 8:14; 1 Pet 2:7-8; Isa 6:9-10 with Acts 28:26-27.

God's providence toward the reprobate: the things He uses to soften the elect hardens the reprobate. Our sins make us sorry and mournful before God. Their sins make them angry and bitter against God. And He is providentially in control of all of it. These things happen through His "means". An important juxtaposition of Scriptures on this subject is 2 Sam. 24:1 and 1 Chron. 21:1.⁹⁵

WCF 5:7: *As the providence of God doth in general reach to all creatures, so after a most special manner it taketh care of His Church, and disposeth all things to the good thereof.(c)*

(c)1 Tim 4:10; Amos 9:8-9; Rom 8:28; Isa 43:3-5, 14.

God's providence extends to all, but He especially has His church in view. There is a purpose in all things for your good. The general call of the Gospel is used by the Spirit to call you inwardly. This "general providence" is a better explanatory phrase than the problematic "common grace". And God's "special manner" of providence toward His Church is a great comfort for Christians. Dr. Bruce Bickel once shared the story of a fellow Navy pilot who died not able to land on the ship during practice runs. A fellow serviceman tried to console his Mother at the funeral, saying, "This was all just a freak accident." The Mother kindly corrected him saying, "That would give me no comfort. But God's providence does." Just this week, a Reformed brother told me he was nearly driven by depression to suicide due to the prolonged, incessant attacks upon him and his family by other family and the government, and if he was an Arminian he probably would have succumbed to the temptation—it was his belief in God's providence that has caused him to persevere and survive.

On a lighter note, the fact that God has eternally decreed something should not keep us from fulfilling our responsibility to make use of His means; Watson explains, "No man argues thus: God has decreed how long I shall live, therefore I will not use means to preserve my life, I will not eat and

⁹⁵ "Even the human soul, in the exercise of free agency, acts according to a law of its own, excluding necessity but not excluding certainty." A.A. Hodge, 97.

drink.”⁹⁶ He also writes, “The wisdom of God wonderfully appears in the works of his providence”, by accomplishing His plan in things that seem contrary, making straight strokes from crooked sticks, scattering through persecution, turning evil things to the good of His children, confounding the wise, and making sin accomplish His good plan;⁹⁷ further, take comfort in difficult or bitter providences that “When God shakes the tree of the body, he is gathering the fruits of righteousness ... God is most in his way, when we think he is most out of the way ... Thou art weak in estate, but God will make thee strong in assurance.”⁹⁸ “God does not infuse evil into men, he withdraws the influence of his graces, and then the heart hardens of itself ...”⁹⁹ “Providence is a Christian’s diary, but not his Bible ... We must not think the better of what is sinful, because it is successful. This is no rule for our actions to be directed by.”¹⁰⁰ “The providence of God infuses comfort and virtue into everything we enjoy ... Learn quietly to submit to divine providence. Do not murmur at things that are ordered by divine wisdom ... though we may not be silent under God’s dishonour, yet we should learn to be silent under his displeasure ... The providences of God are sometimes dark, and our eyes dim, and we can hardly tell what to make of them; but when we cannot unriddle providence, let us believe that it will work together for the good of the elect ... affliction in itself is not joyous, but grievous; but the Lord turns it to the good of his saints.”¹⁰¹ “God’s providence reaches in a more special manner to his church ... God works sometimes by contraries. He raises his church by bringing it low.”¹⁰² “The church is the apple of God’s eye, and the eyelid of his providence daily covers and defends it ... Now we scarce know what to make of God’s providence, and are ready to censure what we do not understand; but in heaven we shall see how all his providences (sickness, losses, sufferings) contributed to our salvation. Here we see but some dark pieces of God’s providence, and it is impossible to judge of his works by pieces; but when we come to heaven, and see the full body and portrait of his providence drawn out into its lively colours, it will be glorious to behold. Then we shall see how all God’s providences helped to fulfil his promises.”¹⁰³

Assigned reading for Wednesday, December 1, 2021: The Fall

- WCF chapter 6 and corresponding Scripture references.
- WLC Q&A 21-29 and corresponding Scripture references.
- WSC Q&A 13-19 and corresponding Scripture references.

Suggested reading:

On Eternal Decree:

- “Predestination” in *Biblical and Theological Studies*, pp. 270-333, B.B. Warfield.
- *Hypercalvinism & the Call of the Gospel*, David Engelsma

⁹⁶ Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 69.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 73-75.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 76.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 122.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 123.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 124-5.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 126.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 127.

- *Predestination*, Gordon H. Clark
- “Determinism and Responsibility”, Gordon H. Clark, in *Trinity Review*, No. 77, January/February, 1991. <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=75>
- *Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, Loraine Boettner
- *Calvin’s Calvinism*, Calvin, Translated by Henry Cole (Reformed Free Publishing)
- *Five Points of Calvinism*, Thomas/Steele
- *Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism*, John Lafayette Girardeau
- *God and Evil: The Problem Solved*, Gordon H. Clark
- *The Sovereignty of God*, A.W. Pink (the unedited version published by Baker Book House).
- http://www.prca.org/pamphlets_and_articles.html#Calvinism_vs_Evolutionism (the first section of this link is vs. Arminianism: there are a LOT of articles here on this topic).
- “Five Points”, G.A. Chan, <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=124>

On Creation:

- “Theistic Evolution an Inharmonious Compromise – A Charge for a Return to the Literal Interpretation of the Six Creation Days in Genesis”, Grant Van Leuven. PRPC’s website Resource page.
- Answers in Genesis with Ken Ham: <http://www.answersingenesis.org/> Great articles/videos.
- Creation and Earth History Museum in San Diego (**Santee**): <http://lifeandlightfoundation.org/museum.html> (Please note, they have a booklet in their store calling Calvinism fatalism and satanic. We thus have discontinued and discouraged our formal participation volunteering for their events until they remove the booklet.)
- *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, Michael Denton
- *Darwin on Trial*, Phillip Johnson
- *Darwin’s Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*, Michael Behe

On Providence:

- *The Crook in the Lot*, Thomas Boston
- *The Mystery of Providence*, John Flavel
- “The Myth of Common Grace”, Garrett P. Johnson, link on PRPC’s website Resources page.
- “A History of Hypocalvinism”, Mark D. Carpenter, link on PRPC’s website Resource page.
- *Jehovah-Jireh: A Treatise on Providence*, William S. Plumer