

**THE WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF
FAITH
V. OF PROVIDENCE**

Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC

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I. WHAT IS PROVIDENCE?

God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.

I. WHAT IS PROVIDENCE?

Nature of Providence:

- God *preserves*
 - All *being* is derived from the *Supreme Being*: only God has *self-existence*.

You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you” (Neh. 9:6).

“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power” (Heb. 1:3).
- God *disposes*
 - Proved by fulfilled prophecies, which could not otherwise be accomplished.
 - All things are directed and disposed towards the ends which God designed.
 - “Every individual has only to look at his life history to discern that there was a higher hand that governed it.” (G.Vos).

“Whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps” (Ps. 135:6).
- God *rules*
 - The Lord actively rules over the heavens and the earth (Hab. 2:20).
 - God’s law remains as the moral order of all life.

I. WHAT IS PROVIDENCE?

Extent of God's Providence:

- **Universal:**
 - “all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least.”
- **All Nations**
 - “He makes nations great, and he destroys them; he enlarges nations, and leads them away” (Job 12).
 - “And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place” (Acts 17:26).
- **All Families**
 - “God settles the solitary in a home; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity, but the rebellious dwell in a parched land” (Ps. 68:6).
- **All Individuals**
 - “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28)
 - “Since his days are determined, and the number of his months is with you, and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass” (Job 14:5).
- **All Things**
 - “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father” (Mt. 10:29).

I. WHAT IS PROVIDENCE?

The Basis of God's Providence:

“by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will.”

- According to God's own holy wisdom

“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” (Rom. 11:34).

- By means of his eternal knowledge of all things

“For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him” (2 Chron. 16:9; Prov. 15:3).

“Known to God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18; Isa. 42:9)

- In keeping with his eternal, unchangeable decree

“The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations” (Ps. 33:11; Eph. 1:11).

I. WHAT IS PROVIDENCE?

The End of God's Providence:

“to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.”

- God eternally glorified in the perfections of his attributes

“so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph. 3:10).

“For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth” (Rom. 9:17).

“They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness” (Ps. 145:7).

2. PROVIDENCE MAKES USE OF MEANS

Although, in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the First Cause, all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly; yet, by the same providence, he ordereth them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.

2. PROVIDENCE MAKES USE OF MEANS

Issues:

- God's decree is infallibly carried out

“I am God and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose’” (Isa. 46:10).
- Yet God ordinarily brings things to pass by *secondary causes*
 - “Male and Female” to bear God's image.

“This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23).

“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent” (Rom. 10:14-15).
- Providence therefore does not rule out or eliminate human freedom and responsibility

“Choose this day whom you will serve, . . . But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Jos. 24:15).

“God fore-ordains their actions, but He fore-ordains them as free actions: as things they do by their own personal volition” (D. Macleod).

3. PROVIDENCE NOT DEPENDENT ON MEANS

God, in his ordinary providence, maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at his pleasure.

- Without means:

“And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm” (Mk. 4:39).

- Above means:

“Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, ‘Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost. So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten” (Jn. 6:11-13).

- Against means:

“When he showed him the place, he cut off a stick and threw it in there and made the iron float” (2 Ki. 6:6).

4. GOD NOT THE AUTHOR OF SIN

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; and that not by a bare permission, but such as hath joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering, and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to his own holy ends; 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.

4. GOD NOT THE AUTHOR OF SIN

- God's providence and the Fall:
 - Man fell into sin by God's will and providence:

“For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all” (Rom. 11:32).
 - God's good and gracious purpose through the Fall:
 - “according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:5-6).
 - God sinlessly employs sins to his own good ends:

“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Gen. 50:20).

“God permits them, he limits them, and he overrules them for the accomplishment of his own holy ends” (R. Shaw).
- God not the author of sin:

“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. . . . Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (Ja. 1:13, 17).

“For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world” (1 Jn. 2:16).

7. PROVIDENCE & THE CHURCH

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.

“And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church” (Eph. 1:22).

“He who touches you touches the apple of his eye” (Zech. 2:8).

“For he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we can confidently say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?’” (Heb. 13:5-6).

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39).