

Presbyterianism 101

Officer Preparation & Christian Enrichment

Review WCF 1-5

- **Scripture**
- **God: the Holy Trinity;**
- **God's Decree;**
- **Creation;**

Governing the Creation

- ***God executes his decrees in the works of creation and providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will.*** (WLC14)
- Simply because a "Christian" holds a view does not make his or her view Christian (i.e. Biblical)

Governing the Creation

- **Atheist**
- **Deist**
- **Pantheist/ Spiritualist**
- **Christian**

Why is Providence placed here?

- **Westminster/Reformed Theology is a System**
- **Chapter 5 prepares us for Chapter 6**

What is Providence

- **Providence is more than knowing beforehand (i.e. Fore+Knowledge)**
- **God's provision for His people:** continued rule and sustaining of the Created Order

The Nature of 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 fore-knowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.

Nature of Providence (5.1)

- God, the Creator, sustains all things in being
- God exercises complete control over action of creatures and natural events in the cosmos
- God's absolute control executes His fixed plan
- God's providence works for the manifestation of His glory in the Creation

Nature of Providence (5.1)

- **Errors confronted:** chance and fate
- Things do not happen without God's determination
- Even God's will is not free, but must always act in accordance with His Nature
- Man's will determined by his heart, and will act in accordance with the heart until changed

Nature of Providence (5.1)

• **Objections to Providence**

- Since God made all things, how can He *not* be in control of what He made?
- God is omnipotent: He can do whatever He wants, whenever He wants
- God is Free: He cannot be prevented

Nature of Providence (5.1)

• **God Sustains what He has made**

- Creation is dependent on Creator: “uphold, direct, dispose, govern”
- God gives His creatures certain properties, and they act in accordance with those properties

Nature of Providence (5.1)

• **God directs all His creatures, all actions**

- History displays God’s providential control
- Every sort of action is included in providence
- **Final Purpose of Providence:** God’s glory

The Scope of Providence

Although, in relation to the fore-knowledge 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.

Scope of Providence (5.2)

• God uses Means (second causes)

- God is the FIRST CAUSE
- God ordains all the means (second causes) by which he designed to accomplish His goals
- God's creatures accomplish His will; many factors at work decreed by God

Scope of Providence (5.2)

• Sometimes God uses Means (second causes)

- God's sovereignty does not destroy man's liberty or necessity of second causes
- Free Second Cause: something we have a choice to do or not to do (e.g. attend or not attend)
- Contingent Second Cause: dependent on the choice of another (e.g. Mephibosheth)

The Scope of Providence

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

Scope of Providence (5.3)

- **Sometimes God does NOT use Means**
 - Second Causes *must* follow Natural Law (a second cause)
 - God is *free* to work outside of the Laws he has established to govern His world
 - Creation, Revelation, Redemption, Salvation all require God to work outside of Natural Law

Providence and Evil (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; 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.

Providence and Evil (5.4)

- **The Origin of Sin Unexplained by WCF**
- **God Permits and Controls Sinful Acts**
 - More than *bare permission*
 - God directs, controls, restrains, and overrules

Providence and Evil (5.4)

- **God's providence blatantly forbids and discourages sin by Law, Threats, Punishments**
 - Sin always proceeds from the Creature
 - God is neither the author nor the approver of sin

Providence and Evil (5.4)

- **Sin and Providence Illustrated:** God ordained sin because of the good He will bring out of it
...this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. (Acts 2:23-24)

Providence and Piety (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 hearts, that they may be humbled; 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.

Providence and Piety (5.5)

• **Struggle with Sin is a fact of Christian living:**

God's providence works toward our holiness

Psa. 32.8-9, *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you."*

Providence and Piety (5.5)

• **Discipline and Chastisement:** God extends and withholds grace at times to His people

- When God withdraws His grace, He reveals the sinfulness of His people to them
- God intends to teach His people to hate sin!

Providence and the Reprobate (5.6)

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

Providence and the Reprobate (5.6)

- **God withholds, removes grace**
- **God Confounds the wicked, gives them over to their sin, and makes them worse**
 - Even what they had s taken away
 - What may have softened other people, hardens the wicked as they are deprived of grace (cf. Pharaoh in Exod. 4ff)

Providence and the Reprobate (5.6)

- **Distinguish: Backsliding (5.5) and Hardening (5.6)**
 - Eventual repentance
 - Danger of toying with God's grace, patience
 - Period of backsliding does not automatically end; sure proof of being a reprobate is waiting for God to end our backsliding, sinful patterns

Providence and the Church (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.

Providence and the Church (5.7)

- **The “Elect” vs. the “Church”**
- **Hierarchy of concern in Providence:** the general government of mankind is subordinate to God’s gracious providence toward His Church
- **God glorifies Himself by redeeming the Church**

Providence and the Church (5.7)

• **God glorifies Himself by redeeming the Church**
Isaiah 43:2-4, *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life*
