

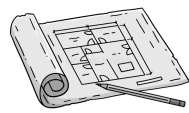
Lesson 9: 2LCF Chapter 5: Of Divine Providence

Paragraphs 1-7

⁵ For I know that the Lord is great, and that our Lord is above all gods.
⁶ Whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.
Psalm 135:5-6

In recent studies we have considered various aspects of God's sovereign purposes and works in the world, both in His decrees and in His creation. In this lesson we will continue to expand upon this study as we look at His sovereign works through divine providence.

God's decrees have often been compared to the blueprints or building plans of a house. Similarly, His providences may be compared to the outworking of that plan—the construction phase, when the written plans become a physical product that can be seen, touched, and enjoyed experientially.



Blueprint = Decrees



Action = Providence

However, there are some important qualifications when one uses this metaphor. When one takes possession of a newly constructed home today, the new residents often have to address many unanticipated issues that arise in even the most well-built home. Sometimes this is the result of imperfect building plans; other times, it is the result of the imprecise execution of these plans. It is simply an accepted fact that follow-up actions and repairs will be needed.

In God's case, all of His plans (decrees) are always perfect and the execution of these plans (providence) is flawless every time. Waldron adds another dimension to this comparison when he adds: "Providence carries out the blueprint or plan by guiding the actual course of history. The decree takes place in eternity. Providence takes place in history."⁸³ In this lesson, we will consider this important doctrine and see how it ought to be a source of great comfort and encouragement for the Christian.

The following outline has been offered for chapter 5 of the Confession:

- I. The Summary Statement of the Doctrine (Paragraph 1)
- II. Major Concerns About the Doctrine
 - A. The relation of providence to the use of means (Paragraphs 2-3)
 - B. The relation of providence to the fact of sin (Paragraphs 4-6)
 - C. The relation of providence to the care of the church (Paragraph 7)⁸⁴

⁸³ Samuel E. Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, 5th ed. (Welwyn Garden City, UK: EP Books, 2016), 105.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 104.

Paragraph 1.

God the good Creator of all things, in His infinite power and wisdom does uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, to the end for the which they were created, according unto His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will; to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy.

Heb. 1:3; Job 38:11; Isa. 46:10,11; Ps. 135:6; Matt. 10:29-31; Eph. 1:11

Exposition

Chapter 5 and paragraph 1 begins with a summary statement on the doctrine of the divine providence. In a single sentence, it efficiently addresses all the following:

- A. The Author of Providence: "the good Creator"
- B. The Foundation of Providence: "his infinite power and wisdom"
- C. The Essence of Providence: "uphold, direct, dispose, and govern"
- D. The Objects of Providence: "all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least"
- E. The Nature of Providence: "by his most wise and holy providence"
- F. The Compatibility of Providence (with His creation): "to the end for which they were created"
- G. The Determining Causes of God's Providence: "his infallible foreknowledge and the free and immutable counsel of His own will"
- H. The Goal of Providence: "to the praise of the glory . . ." ⁸⁵

Paragraph 2.

Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly; so that there is not anything befalls any by chance, or without His providence; yet by the same providence He ordered them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.

Acts 2:23; Prov. 16:33; Gen. 8:22

Paragraph 3.

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

Acts 27:31, 44; Isa. 55:10, 11; Hosea 1:7; Rom. 4:19-21; Dan. 3:27

Exposition

Paragraphs 2 and 3 of the confession clearly identify the use of means in God's divine providence. These paragraphs answer the question, "What difference do I or others make in God's plan?" As it turns out, man plays a vitally important role in the execution of God's plan; though God is not dependent on man.

The confession refers to these as primary and secondary causes. Renihan explains difference between the two below:

⁸⁵ Ibid.

“The first cause is God, the good creator, expressing His foreknowledge and decree. His foreknowledge is infallible, and thus cannot err or fail, and His decree is eternal, an expression of the ad extra acts of the sovereign Lord... God's decree immutably and infallibly accomplishes all His holy will... this does not, however, rule out the importance of second causes, which themselves are essential to the doctrine of Providence and are the means God uses to accomplish his purposes... the second causes are the natural processes of the created order, rooted in the decree of God. We see natural events and correctly described natural reason for them, while not denying that they happen because of the decree.”⁸⁶

This use of primary and secondary causes is seen throughout the Bible. Here are two well-known examples:

Genesis 50:20

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.

Acts 2:23

this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

Paragraph 4.

The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God, so far manifest themselves in His providence, that His determinate counsel extends itself even to the first fall, and all other sinful actions both of angels and men; and that not by a bare permission, which also He most wisely and powerfully binds, and otherwise orders and governs, in a manifold dispensation to His most holy ends; yet so, as the sinfulness of their acts proceeds only from the creatures, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.

Rom. 11:32-34; 2 Sam. 24:1; 1 Chron. 21:1; 2 Kings 19:28; Ps. 76:10; Gen. 1:20; Isa. 10:6,7,12; Ps. 1;21; 1 John 2:16

Paragraph 5.

The most wise, righteous, and gracious God does often times leave for a season His own children to manifold temptations and the corruptions 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 other just and holy ends. So that whatsoever befalls any of His elect is by His appointment, for His glory, and their good.

2 Chron. 32:25,26,31; 2 Cor. 12:7-9; Rom. 8:28

Paragraph 6.

As for those wicked and ungodly men whom God, as the righteous judge, for former sin does blind and harden; from them He not only withholds His grace, whereby they might have been enlightened in their understanding, and wrought upon their hearts; but sometimes also withdraws the gifts which they had, and exposes them to such objects as their corruption makes occasion of sin; and withal, gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and the power of Satan,

⁸⁶ James M. Renihan, *To the Judicious and Impartial Reader: A Contextual-Historical Exposition of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith*, Baptist Symbolics 2 (Cape Coral: Founders Press, 2022), 153.

whereby it comes to pass that they harden themselves, under those means which God uses for the softening of others.
Rom. 1:24-26,28, 11:7,8; Deut. 29:4; Matt. 13:12; Deut. 2:30; 2 Kings 8:12,13; Ps. 81:11,12; 2 Thess. 2:10-12; Exod. 8:15,32; Isa. 6:9,10; 1 Pet. 2:7,8

Exposition

Paragraphs 4-6 deal with the problem of sin and the role of divine providence in these actions.

Jim Domm elaborates:

God's providence extends even to the sinful actions of his creatures. Yet he is not the author of sin. Human reason stumbles at such an assertion because it doesn't seem logical. We may not completely understand this or be able to explain it, but the Word of God brings all debate to an end. The Bible clearly asserts that divine providence extends even to the sinful actions of people. At the same time, the Bible is equally clear when it asserts that God is not the author of sin.⁸⁷

In addition to Genesis 50:20, we find many other examples of this in Scripture:

2 Samuel 14:1

Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go, number Israel and Judah."

1 Samuel 16:14

Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the Lord tormented him.

Acts 4:27-28

for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

In paragraph 5, we can also take comfort in this fact: the Lord's providences all ultimately work for the good of his people, no matter how bitter they may seem in the moment (Rom. 8:28). Nicholas Estwick speaks to this as he comments on the phrase "other just and holy ends:"

Let us lay all we have down at the feet of our God, and let us be contented that he should dispose of our health, of our wealth, of our lives, and of all that doth belong unto us. Our souls must stand like Elijah in the mouth of of [sic] the Cave, ready to come out, when God shall call us, and with Abraham at the door of his tent, ready to entertain death, or any evil which God shall send.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Jim Domm, "Chapter Five: Of Divine Providence," in *A New Exposition of the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, ed. Rob Ventura (Ross-shire: Mentor, 2022), 120.

⁸⁸ Nicholas Estwick, *Christ's Submission to His Fathers Will* (London: George Miller, 1644).

Paragraph 7.

As the providence of God does in general reach to all creatures, so after a more special manner it takes care of His church, and disposes of all things to the good thereof.

1 Tim. 4:10; Amos 9:8,9; Isa. 43:3-5

Exposition

Sam Waldron comments:

Who, if anyone, enjoys God's special care? Is it the famous, the great, the political leaders, the Jews? No! It is the church. This is an often veiled, but very comforting fact. Where is the focal point of God's providence in the world? Is it Jerusalem, where the temple was? Is it Rome, at the Vatican? Is it Mecca? No, it is where we, the church, are. Do not invite a secular mentality as to what is important in life. It is for the sake of the church that everything in life happens."⁸⁹

Application

The doctrine of divine providence is thoroughly practical. Jim Domm, a Reformed Baptist pastor and author rightly points out that a sound understanding and embrace of this doctrine will protect you from some of the most common besetting sins that many of us struggle with:

1. **Sinful Anxiety.** This includes worry about money, work, health, relationships, an uncertain future, and a host of other things... The doctrine of divine providence stimulates courage and safeguards against sinful anxiety.
2. **Blame-shifting.** Carnal blame-shifting feeds bitterness, resentment, and division. The doctrine of divine providence enables faith to see beyond secondary agencies.
3. **Discontentment.** Dissatisfaction can be good if it motivates to right actions, but discontentment that springs from lust and greed is wrong. Such discontentment is aimed directly at God. The refusal to accept the station in life that God has allotted is to argue with Him, and to question His wisdom, goodness, and love. The doctrine of divine providence helps to neutralize an attitude of carnal discontentment.
4. **Complaining.** The frequent verbalizing of dissatisfaction with circumstances or other people is a sure indicator that one has not practically embraced the doctrine of divine providence. Again, carnal complaining is directly aimed at God. The doctrine of divine providence is a powerful antidote to complaining.
5. **Ingratitude.** The root of all discontentment and complaining is an unthankful spirit. We must remember that, as believers, God has not dealt with us according to our sins. We're not in hell, but we deserve to be. Whatever our station or condition, we have much to be thankful for. The doctrine of divine providence is an incentive to gratitude to God.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Samuel E. Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, 5th ed. (Welwyn Garden City, UK: EP Books, 2016), 107.

⁹⁰ Jim Domm, "Chapter Five: Of Divine Providence," in *A New Exposition of the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, ed. Rob Ventura (Ross-shire: Mentor, 2022), 115-16.