

Instruction In The Westminster Standards

The Historic Standards of Presbyterian Denominations.

STUDIES IN THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

Q. 11. What are God's works of providence?

A. God's works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.

Scripture References: Ps. 145:17. Ps. 104:24. Heb. 1:3. Ps. 103:19.
Matt. 10:29, 30.

Questions:

1. What is the meaning of the word "providence?"

The meaning of the word providence is that of care, the ability to foresee what is coming and to make provision for it.

2. What are the parts of God's providence?

The parts of God's providence are: 1. His preservation of things (Ps. 36:6). 2. His government of things (Ps. 67:4).

3. How does creation and providence differ?

Dr. Charles Hodge states, "Creation, preservation, and government are in fact different, and to identify them leads not only to confusion but to error. Creation and preservation differ — first, as the former is the calling into existence of what did not exist, and the latter is continuing, or causing to continue, what already has a being; and secondly, in creation there is and can be no cooperation, but in preservation there is a concursus (harmonious cooperation) of the first, with second causes. In the Bible, therefore, the two things are never confounded. God created all things, and by Him all things consist." (Systematic Theology, Vol. 1, Pg. 578)

4. To what does God's providence extend?

1. All His creatures, especially His children. 2. The actions of His creatures.

5. Does His providence extend to all the actions of His creatures?

Yes, it extends to all actions. To hold otherwise would be to say that the creatures would be independent in their actions and then God would not be the first cause of all things.

6. If providence includes all actions of men, does this mean the sinful actions as well as the good actions?

Yes, even the sinful actions of men are controlled by God's providence but this does not make Him responsible for their actions. God permits men to sin (Acts 14:16). God limits and restrains men in their sins (Ps. 76:10). God directs and disposes men's sins to good ends, beyond their own intentions (Isa. 10:5,6,7).

7. What is the purpose of God's providence?

The purpose of God's providence is the manifesting of God's own glory.

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD AND THE WORD

In Article 13 of the Belgic Confession, its section on Divine Providence, there appears the following words, “. . . to learn only those things which He has revealed to us in His Word, without transgressing these limits.”

There has always been a danger in the church of Jesus Christ to become confused as to the doctrine of providence. Some believers in Christ, recognizing that God is Sovereign and convinced of His preserving and governing powers, take it to mean that they should wait on the providence of God to discover their duty. They forget that the providence of God shows us the path of God and does not point out our path. They forget that our rule of faith and practice is the Word of God, not His purpose fulfilled in a providence. Goodwin stated it this way: “We are not to go in businesses merely by providences, for we shall find that oftentimes providences do lay fair occasions for sinning. When Jonah was to go to Tarshish, he had the fairest providences that could be; he found a ship all ready; ay, but he went against the word of God. Never be ruled by providences, they may be temptations and probations; be ruled by The Word of God alone.”

Indeed we are “to learn only those things which He has revealed to us in His Word.” We are not to get involved in the non-Christian conceptions of chance. It should be quite significant to the Christian that even Hitler mouthed the word “providence” many times. We recognize though with Berkouwer that “no one can believe in the Providence of God without knowing the way to God through Jesus Christ.” But we are to further recognize that the ways in which we walk will be ways that must be consistent with The Word of God. We must not wait on providence to lead us but recognize that God’s revelation has come to us through His Word.

The Providence of God affords us great comfort. It tells us that God directs us. It tells us that He watches over us. It tells us that He restrains us. But all these things are done within the limits of The Word of God and are not the ruling factors in our lives but the great thought behind our actions, actions taken according to His Word — i.e. that God is always in control of His world.

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