

FOUNDATIONS

LESSON 13 - PROVIDENCE

For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. (Col 1:16-17)

Main Idea: God preserves and governs everything in the universe for His glory and His peoples' good.

I. What do we mean by providence?

A. *Defined:* "God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he (1) keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them; (2) cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do; and (3) directs them to fulfill his purposes."⁶

1. *Preservation* – God's maintaining of those things that he has made.
2. *Governance* – God actively rules all things to a definite end, in order to accomplish his divine purpose.
3. *Concurrence* – God's use of secondary causes that God uses in the ordering of all things.

B. In creation, God brought into existence. Providence now describes the way by which God sustains his creation.

"If creation is the calling into existence something that did not exist before...then Providence means the continuation, or the causing to continue, of that which has been called into existence. Creation brings things into existence, providence keeps them, or guarantees their continuation in existence, in the fulfillment of God's purposes."⁷

C. In what ways is providence exercised?

1. *General providence*
2. *Special providences*
3. *Extra-ordinary providences*

II. What does the Bible teach about Providence?

A. The Bible teaches that God actively involved in governing and sustaining all things (Ps 104, Ps 103:19). We find this teaching in the following Scriptural teachings:

1. Direct statements (see next point)
2. Prophecies
3. Answers to prayer
4. Miracles

B. Outside of general claims, the Bible also specifically teaches God's providence over a wide range of specific entities:

1. God's providence is exercised over the whole universe (Eph 1:11)
2. God's providence is exercised over physical creation (Matt 5:45)
3. God's providence extends over the brute creation, the animals (Matt 10:29)
4. God's providence extends over the affairs of nations (Job 12:24, Acts 17:26)
5. God's providence governs man's birth and lot in life (I Sam 16:1, Gal 1:15)
6. God's providence determines outcomes, failures, and successes (Ps 75:6-7)
7. God's providence extends over that which seems accidental (Esther 6)
8. God's providence protects the righteous (Ps 4:8)
9. God's providence provides for the needs of his people (Phil 4:19)
10. God's providence orchestrates the answers to the prayers of his people. (numerous)

⁶ Grudem, 315.

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- C. The Bible teaches that God exercises His providence over all things for His glory and the good of His people.
- D. The Bible teaches that human actions are consequential in determining the course of events in the exercise of God's providence.

III. The Problem of Evil

- A. How can sin and evil exist if a good God providentially controls everything?
 - 1. This issue can present a huge stumbling block for faith and can hinder Christians in their walk with the Lord.
 - 2. Specific examples that show up in Scripture that seem to suggest that God "causes" people to sin or do evil:
 - i. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart (Ex 4:21, Rom 9:16)
 - ii. Samson's desire to marry an unbelieving Philistine (Judges 14:4)
 - iii. The Lord "incited" David to take a census of the people, though David later recognizes this as sinful (2 Sam 24:1-10, I Chron 21:1)
 - iv. God puts a "lying spirit" in the mouths of Ahab's prophets (I King 22:23)
 - 3. Scripture also directly affirms that from God come both that which is "good" and "evil"
(Is 45:7, Lam 3:38, Acts 4:27)
- B. God controls evil, but is never the cause of it.
 - 1. Sinful acts are under God's control and only occur with His permission. (Gen 45:8).
 - 2. God restrains and controls sin (Ps 76:10)
 - 3. God overrules sin for good (Gen 50:20)
 - 4. God never causes sin nor approves of it. He only permits, directs, restrains, limits, and overrules it. People alone are responsible for their sin. (James 1:13-14)
- C. Cautions to Christians when thinking about evil in the world:
 - 1. Posture in how you approach the problem of evil is key.
 - 2. God's providence and sovereignty does not reduce man's accountability for his actions. (Eccl. 7:29)
 - 3. Evil is real and deadly.

IV. General points for personal application

- A. The whole of God's providence is exercised for the sake of God's people (Rom 8:28). Rejoice and be comforted in the fact that the eternal, all-powerful God is exercising this providence for your salvation and eternal joy.
- B. Be careful in how you apply this doctrine to any particular event in the world or your life. Outside what we know revealed to us directly in Scripture, the providential acts of God are shrouded in mystery. (Rom 11:33-36)
- C. God isn't too big to care about the individual details of individual lives. God through Christ and by the HS is imminently involved in the lives of His creation and His people. God answers even the smallest prayers (Phil 4:6)