

**The 1689 Confession of Faith, Chapter 5 – “Of Divine Providence”, Session # 1 –
“God the Good Creator”, Presented in the Adult Sunday School Class,
and Presented by Pastor Paul Rendall on January 20th, 2019.**

Paragraph 1 - God the good Creator of all things, in his infinite power and wisdom doth a) uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the b) 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 c) own will; to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy.

a) Hebrews 1: 3; Job 38: 11; Isa 46: 10-11; Psalm 135: 6; b) Matthew 10: 29-31; c) Ephesians 1: 11)

Our 1689 Confession words the first phrase of the first sentence of this first paragraph slightly differently from the Westminster and Savoy Confessions. The 1689 says, “God the Good Creator of all things, in His infinite power and wisdom doth uphold... The Westminster and Savoy Confessions say – “God the Great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, etc. Now, why would you think that the framers of the 1689 Confession would replace the word “great” with “good” in that first phrase? I believe that they changed the wording in this way because they believed that God in His Divine Providence has very prominently and practically displayed His goodness to all of His creation and all the creatures that He has made, so that they could know it and appreciate it. God’s providence should be highly valued by all men. They should rejoice in it greatly and praise Him for it continually. God is infinitely great in His the execution of His Divine purposes, but in His Providence He is Personally good to you and to me. I think that this can be demonstrated from the word of God itself.

Psalm 145: 3-9 – “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable.” “One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts.” “I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wondrous works.” “Men shall speak of the might of your awesome acts, and I will declare Your greatness.” “They shall utter (eagerly utter – NAS) the memory of Your great goodness, and shall sing of Your righteousness.” “The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy.” “The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works.”

Now, you can plainly see here that God’s greatness is declared and He is most certainly to be praised for it. His greatness is something that we cannot search out to its depths because He is infinite in His greatness and power, but we most certainly should admire these attributes and glory in them, and worship God for His greatness. God’s providence is according to His infinite greatness, and it evidences itself in His mighty acts. We who know the Lord meditate on the glorious splendor of God’s majestic Being, and we declare His greatness. But notice, further, that we will eagerly utter the memory of His great goodness, and even sing of His righteousness, because He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and great in mercy. He is good to all men everywhere and His tender mercies are over all of His works. Certainly God’s greatness comes to be seen and felt and known and understood to us in terms of His goodness and mercy which He shows to all, and especially to those who believe in Him.

1. A simple Biblical Definition of God’s Divine Providence –

Ephesians 1: 11 – “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.”

This is a good and simple definition of God’s Divine Providence – He works all things according to the counsel of His will. He created all things, and He upholds all that He has created, working His eternal will out in time and space according to His eternal counsel.

Westminster Shorter Catechism –

Question 11 – What are God’s works of providence?

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

All of the works of God’s providence are holy works, they are wise works and they are powerful works, whereby He preserves and governs all of His creatures and all of their actions.

Westminster Larger Catechism –

Question 18 – What is God’s providence?

Answer – God’s providence is his completely holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing every creature and every action, ordering them all to his own glory.

This statement takes us one step farther than the Shorter Catechism and it tell us that God’s governing, His watching over them and ruling over them in righteousness in regard to every action of theirs is all done to His own glory; the excellence of His Being and grace, both common grace and saving grace.

Wilhemus A’Brakel says – The Heidelberg Catechism clearly and devoutly describes providence as follows –

“The Almighty and everywhere present power of God; whereby, as it were by His hand, He upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, and all things come, not by chance, but by His Fatherly hand; that we may be patient in adversity; thankful in prosperity; and that in all things, which may hereafter befall us, we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father, that nothing shall separate us from His love; since all creatures are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move.”

Pastor Greg Nichols in his Systematic Theology, Vol. 2, P. 94 – “God the Creator, by His omnipotence, upholds all reality and governs all history, meticulously in the minutest detail, with infinite wisdom and impeccable virtue, according to the good pleasure and eternal purpose of His will for His own glory.”

John Gill in his Body of Divinity says this – “The next eternal work of God is Providence; by which all the creatures God has made are preserved, governed, guided, and directed.” “The word itself is never used of the divine Being syllabically, or in so many syllables in scripture; yet the thing itself, or what is meant by it, is fully declared and clearly expressed; as, that God upholds all things by the word of His power; governs the world by His wisdom; looks down upon

the earth, takes notice and care of all His creatures in it, and makes provision for them,, and guides and directs them to answer the ends for which they were made; which is the sum and substance of Providence.”

The Divine Providence that we are speaking of now, is distinct from His foresight, His foreknowledge, and His predestination because all of these have respect to acts in the Mind of God in eternity. These all relate to the eternal purposes and decrees of God. God foresaw and foreknew all the persons that He would create, and all that He would do in time from the beginning to the end of the world. We can conceive of this as Eternal Providence or His Providence in Purpose. But Providence in Time, which is what we are now considering, should be thought of as His Actual Providence; that is, the execution of whatever God has foreknown and determined. (Paraphrase of Gill’s thought on this, found on P. 278 of his Body of Divinity.)

2. God’s Divine Providence is something which we should regularly praise God for.

Psalm 147: 1-20 – “Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; For it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful. The LORD builds up Jerusalem; He gathers together the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted And binds up their wounds. He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name. Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite. The LORD lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked down to the ground. Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; Sing praises on the harp to our God, Who covers the heavens with clouds, Who prepares rain for the earth, Who makes grass to grow on the mountains. He gives to the beast its food, And to the young ravens that cry. He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man. The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, In those who hope in His mercy. Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion! For He has strengthened the bars of your gates; He has blessed your children within you. He makes peace in your borders, And fills you with the finest wheat. He sends out His command to the earth; His word runs very swiftly. He gives snow like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes; He casts out His hail like morsels; Who can stand before His cold? He sends out His word and melts them; He causes His wind to blow, and the waters flow. He declares His word to Jacob, His statutes and His judgments to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any nation; And as for His judgments, they have not known them. Praise the LORD!”

Why does the Psalmist praise the Lord? Because it is good to sing praises to our God? Why? Because praise is pleasant, and it is beautiful. Why even more? Verse 2 – “Because the Lord builds up Zion by His providentially ordering all things together for her good; that is, for the good of the Church; both Old Testament and New. Notice all of the good things that He does for His people. He builds up Jerusalem. Not only the Old Testament people of God coming to know His goodness and mercy to them to literally build up their city and establish their worship in those times. But also we should consider this verse referring to the Church in New Testament times. The Lord Jesus Christ, who is the builder of His Church does this good work at many points and times in this age, and shall build it up exceedingly in times to come. He will gather the outcasts of Israel... And He will gather many from all the nations of the world so that they will no longer be strangers and aliens from the covenants of promise but will be fellow-citizens with the saints. He has been doing this all along during this age, and will continue to build up Jerusalem; that is spiritual Israel more and more, even though beset by persecution at times.

Look at how personal His concern is for all who will look to Him in faith. Verse 3 – “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” This is what God does through the grace of our

Lord Jesus, for all who trust in Him and look to Him to have their heart which has been broken by sin, and by their failures to do God's will, healed by Christ's grace so that the wounds which sin has inflicted on the heart are bound up. This happens according to the Providential will and working of God. It is the same God who knows and considers your heart, who counts all the stars, knows the exact number of them, actually calls them all by name. Truly, He is great in power and His understanding is infinite, and these attributes are perfectly displayed in all of His works, which then is understood by us as His goodness. Let us glory in the fact that He lifts up the humble, and He casts down the wicked. Let us sing to Him our praises that He does all of these good things which He mentions in verse 8-20. Let us be mindful of His kind providential care over our lives every day, and praise and thank Him for it.