

LORD'S DAY 10

27. Q. What do you understand by the providence of God?

A. God's providence is His almighty and ever present power,¹ whereby, as with His hand, He still upholds heaven and earth and all creatures,² and so governs them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty,³ indeed, all things, come to us not by chance⁴ but by His fatherly hand.⁵

1. **Jeremiah 23:23-24** "Am I a God near at hand," says the LORD, and not a God afar off?²⁴ Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him?" says the LORD; "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" says the LORD.

Acts 17:24-28 "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.²⁵ Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.²⁶ And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,²⁷ so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;²⁸ for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'

2. **Hebrews 1:3** ...who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high....

3. **Proverbs 22:2** The rich and the poor have this in common, the LORD is the maker of them all.

Jeremiah 5:24 They do not say in their heart, "Let us now fear the LORD our God, who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season. He reserves for us the appointed weeks of the harvest."

John 9:3 Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor

his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him."

Acts 14:15-17 ...and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them,¹⁶ who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways.¹⁷ Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

4. **Proverbs 16:33** The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

5. **Deuteronomy 32:39** Now see that I, even I, am He, and there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; nor is there any who can deliver from My hand.

Isaiah 45:7 I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things.

Lamentations 3:38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that woe and well-being proceed?

Amos 3:6 If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid? If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it?

Matthew 10:29 "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will."

28. Q. What does it benefit us to know that God has created all things and still upholds them by His providence?

A. We can be patient in adversity,¹ Thankful in prosperity,² and with a view to the future we can have a firm confidence in our faithful God and Father that no creature shall separate us from His love;³

for all creatures are so completely in His hand
that without His will
they cannot so much as move.⁴

1. **Job 1:21,22** And he said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”²² In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.

Psalm 39:10 Remove Your plague from me; I am consumed by the blow of Your hand.

James 1:3 ...knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

2. **Deuteronomy 8:10** When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 ...in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

3. **Psalm 55:22** Cast your burden on the LORD, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.

Romans 5:3-5 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Romans 8:38,39 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing,

shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

4. **Job 1:12** And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person.” So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

Job 2:6 And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life.”

Proverbs 21:1 The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.

Acts 17:24-28 “God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. ²⁵ Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. ²⁶ And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, ²⁷ so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ²⁸ for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’



In this Lord’s Day we will discuss the providence of God. By “*providence*” we mean that power of God whereby He governs and rules all things in His creation. Everything that happens, happens according to the will of God and in accordance with His plan for the fullness of time. The Catechism leaves no room for anything to fall outside the scope of God’s control. All things are in God’s power. Even the most insignificant things imaginable are under His direction. In Lord’s Day 1 we confessed this when we said; “*that without my Father’s will not a hair can fall from my head.*” What is more insignificant than a hair from our head? Yet God controls even such minute events. There is absolutely nothing in this universe that is not sovereignly controlled by God.

If this is so, and it is, then there is no such thing as chance, fate, fortune or luck. God’s providence leaves no room for belief in, or talk about, lucky charms, rabbit’s feet or four-leaf clovers. God’s providence leaves no room for black cats, broken mirrors or Friday 13th. For there are no forces in this universe, personal or impersonal, which are not controlled by God. God is sovereign, that is: God is in control of all things. He decides what will happen, and when, where and how, etc. This is God’s providence.

In Lord’s Day 9 we confessed that God works all things for our good. In saying this, the Catechism has simply quoted the apostle Paul, who wrote, “*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who*

are the called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28).

That all things work together for our good is easy to believe when things go the way we suppose they ought to go. We think that health and prosperity are good for us. Yet do we think the same of sickness and poverty? When we experience great difficulties, it becomes harder to believe in the providence of God. If a mother or father dies, who still has young children at home, we would have difficulty in seeing the good of such a death. The mother or father might well wonder, "How can this turn out for our good and the good of our children?" We know that there is a great need for that parent to remain with his or her family. All children need a mum and a dad. Yet even in times like that we have to believe in the providence of God, as difficult as it is. We must and we may believe that God has a purpose for this. We must and may believe that this, like all things, will turn out for our good and for our salvation.

It is also hard to trust in God's providential care when we do not receive the things we think we urgently need. During World War II there were many in the Netherlands who suffered from shortage of food. In such times when the stomach cried out in pain for food, it was difficult to trust that God would provide what was needed. The temptation to take matters into one's own hands and steal some food was great, and many gave in to that temptation.

When we speak about the providence of God, the question concerning sin and evil also enters the picture: "Do these also come by the hand of God?" We must speak carefully and reverently here. God created all things good, but all things are not good any more. Some of God's good creation has lost their excellence at the fall of Satan and of man. This evil in and around us makes the life of God's children difficult. Do we believe that this is also in God's control? Or does Satan have free reign to do as he pleases?

Here, too, we profess the providence of God. There is no creature, neither Satan nor man, who can act in a manner outside of God's control. God did not create sin and evil, but He certainly controls them both. God hardens the heart of whomever He wills, and He softens the heart of whomever He wills (cf. Rom 9). This becomes clear in the case of Pharaoh. Pharaoh was completely in God's power. He could do only that which God allowed him to do. God did not cause him to sin, yet God certainly controlled that sin. God can, and often does, put a bridle on sin. God prevents both Satan and evil men from having free reign in their work of destruction.



Why does God permit sin if He is able to stop it? God permits it because He is able to use it for the fulfilment of His purpose and counsel. Do you remember the story of Joseph? Remember how his brothers sold him as a slave? His brothers wanted to destroy him. No doubt Joseph asked the Lord when he was carted off, "*Why have You allowed this to happen, LORD?*" He must have wondered why God did not intervene to prevent this horrible sin. Yet in Genesis 50:20, we read what Joseph says to his brothers: "*You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good.*" God used the sin of Joseph's brothers for the good of Jacob's family. God used a bad situation for his good. This does not give those who do wrong an excuse, since it turns out good anyway. No, God will judge them for the wrong that they have done.

The providence of God must be believed also in those times when it seems that the ungodliness of man reigns freely. How many people asked during World War 1 where God was in the concentration camps, where thousands of innocent

Jews were killed. Many people said that they could not believe in a God of providence after seeing or hearing about such events. Yet even in these terrible situations (and in others like it, such as wars, earthquakes, epidemics etc.) God reigns supreme.

God allows these things to happen. Why? Perhaps it is to bring judgment upon the ungodly. Perhaps it is to test the faith of God's people. The exact reasons cannot be known. Yet this we know, that God will use even the evil that occurs, to promote His purpose and plans. In all situations of life God is governing and guiding history to the consummation of the ages, the day of Christ's return.

In the history of the church, there have been those who say that God exists, and that God created the world, but that He no longer takes an active part in the governing of this world. They are called "Deists." They believe that God created the world with a self-governing mechanism like that of a clock. God wound it up, so to speak, and then left it to run on its own without any continued participation on God's part.

If this were true, then there would be no use for prayer. If all things run according to some mechanism then save your breath, for a machine cannot hear or change its course.

Since we know about God's providence, we are able to pray. If God did not rule, there would be no use for prayer. It would be futile, worthless. Yet since we know that God rules all things, we can ask Him for help in all situations.

The doctrine of God's providence should make us patient in times of difficulty. Patience in such times means more than just waiting for things to get better. Patience means trusting that even these difficult times will turn to our advantage. This means that we willingly accept adversity because God sends it for our advantage. Whenever we grumble or complain in times of adversity, we display a lack of trust in God's providential care

over us. How that must grieve our most gracious Father!

The doctrine of God's providence should also make us thankful in times of prosperity. This thankfulness is more than just being happy or joyous. It is possible to be happy in one's prosperity without even thinking about God's providence behind it or thanking God for it. Furthermore, we must continue to trust in God in these times of prosperity. It is all too easy to forget about our dependency upon God, and think that we have things in our own control.

This doctrine of providence should also give us a confident hope about our eternal security. There is nothing in all of creation, whether physical forces or spiritual forces which can separate us from the love of God, for God governs both the physical as well as the spiritual realm of creation. Paul wrote eloquently of his confidence for the future: "*For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" (Romans 8:38,39).



Questions:

1. What do we mean by the providence of God?
2. Does God only govern the important events in life, or also the insignificant? Can you show this from the Scriptures?
3. What is the opposite of providence?
4. Give some examples of how men deny the providence of God.
5. When is it easy to trust in the providence of God? When is it difficult? Give an example for each.
6. Does the sin and evil which man commits also come under the providence of God?
7. Why does God permit evil to occur? What can we be confident of in such times?
8. Describe the theory called "*Deism*."
9. The providence of God should evoke three responses from us. Which are they, and why does God's providence evoke these responses?