

“GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY OVER ALL THINGS.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

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**Sermon Texts: Job 12:23; Isaiah 45:7; 64:8; Matthew 10:29-30; Hebrews 1:3
Belgic Confession, Article 13**

Introduction.

Nearly all religions of the world acknowledge some form of divine government and control. Even the pagans have their fate or luck or chance, something that guides the destinies of men and nations.

Nearly everyone believes in God, but there are many who have trouble with Him being in control. They can’t bring themselves to believe it for a variety of reasons. Some look at the great disasters or human tragedies and ask, “If there was really a good and powerful God, how could He let this happen?”

Others aren’t affected so much by what happens in the world, but when faced with overwhelming personal troubles God seems too small or powerless for their needs.

Wars and cancer have done much to wreck man’s confidence in a sovereign and good God. Suffering and sin are huge hurdles to our confession of the sovereignty of God.

For others providence smacks of fatalism or determinism to them and leaves them thinking they are puppets.

The rejection of any notion of God’s total sovereignty over all things is one of the biggest challenges facing the church and Christians today.

The Providence of our Creator God.

Providence is God’s good rule and governance of all things according to His will and pleasure. The doctrine of the providence of God works out practically like this.

From before the foundations of the earth through the birth, life and death of all my distant ancestors, through my own physical birth to John and Verna Woodyard in Los Angeles in 1956, through my growing up years and initial interests in math and science and a career as a scientist, through my spiritual birth through Young Life at Malibu Club in Canada in 1972, through my new interests in a career in youth ministry to my turning to pastoral ministry, through my marriage to Phama Hostetler in 1980, through my selection of Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary over Fuller Theological Seminary, through my going to my first call in Cedar Grove, Wisconsin, through the birth of five sons, and a second call to Oklahoma City, OK and through a series of remarkable circumstances my coming to Lynden, Washington, every minute detail of my life, every twist and turn, every move and change, every success and failure, every good action and every sinful intention, and the number of my days that remain have all been ordained and ordered and controlled by a good and perfect sovereign Almighty God for His glory and pleasure and for my blessing and benefit.

All of it. Not just my salvation. Not just the spiritual parts. Not just when I have willed Him to lead or act. This is not just a doctrine, this is a daily experienced practical reality. This is truth that touches everything that happens every day. This is not just stuff for our heads but for our hearts and hands and feet.

Belgic Confession Article 13 picks up where Article 12 leaves off. God is the creator of all things, and not only just the creator, He also remains intimately involved in all He created and continues to sustain and lead and govern all He has created.

Article 13 concludes the first section of the Belgic Confession. We began in Article 1 confessing that God is “Eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite and almighty” and we conclude that God is personal and intimately involved.

In Article 1 we confessed that God is “the overflowing fountain of all good” and now we see that that truth extends to every molecule, every creature and thing in every corner of this universe.

So great is His care and love for us. We would do well to know well the depth of this doctrine for the comfort and encouragement of our own souls and the souls of those we have opportunity to talk with.

God’s Providence over all things.

Hebrews 1:3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he *upholds the universe by the word of his power.*

This could not be more clear. With the same Word that God used to create the world and all that is in it, with that same Word God upholds and sustains all the world and all that is in it.

He abandons nothing He has made. He washes His hands of nothing. He did not turn the operation or administration of His creation over to chance or fortune or luck or even the natural laws of science. The same energy and power that started it all, also keeps it all going.

Ephesians 1:11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works *all things* according to the counsel of his will,

This eternal providence is His care for *all things*. God doesn’t work some things or the really big things, but all things according to His purpose and will.

God is the ultimate hands-on micromanager. God is completely in control of everything. His hand may be hidden to us, but his presence and rule are absolute. What God starts He finishes.

This universe would not and could not continue to exist for one minute without God’s direct power and control and influence.

Psalms 115:3 Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

Proverbs 16:9 In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.

Isaiah 45:7 God declares, “I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.

Amos 3:6 When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble?
When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?

He sends the sun and the rain. He raises up nations and brings them down. He numbers our hairs and decides which ones and how many will fall out. He numbers our days and determines their end.

Two years after the Belgic Confession was written the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism wrote a similar question and answer in Number 27.

Q.27. WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND BY THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD?

A. Providence is the almighty and ever present power of God by which he upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty - all things, in fact, come to us *not by chance* but from his fatherly hand.

Providence is not the same as fatalism or determinism.

How is providence different from fatalism or determinism? Why aren't we just resigned to defeat, that there's nothing we can do and nothing that matters?

Fatalism and determinism make fate and destiny the cause and determiner of what happens. They are impersonal, uncaring, disinterested. They undermine a personal, caring God. Anything that removes God or depersonalizes God is unbiblical.

Providence focuses on God and reveals a God who is personal, interested, directly involved and caring and concerned about His creation. God is not an absentee landlord.

Providence is the opposite of fortune, luck, chance or fate. To these R.C. Sproul says:

“Fortune is blind while God is all-seeing. Fate is impersonal while God is a Father. Luck is dumb while God can speak. There are no blind, impersonal forces at work in human history. All is brought to pass by the invisible hand of Providence.”

Providence doesn't make God the author of sin and evil.

If God ordained sin and evil, yet those who do it are responsible and are guilty of sin, how can this be? Why are we the source and not God?

The confession acknowledges that this is difficult to understand. We cannot fully understand the mysterious workings of God. We know He is infinite and incomprehensible. We know God is holy and just and good. And we know He is without sin and never the author of sin or evil.

Part of the problem is that sin has corrupted us and makes it impossible for us to reason clearly about some things. We must learn to accept the limits of our fallible fallen human reason.

But Scripture does teach that God is not the source or author of sin and evil.

James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

I John 2:16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.

From Scripture here is what we can say about evil:

God permits evil.

Acts 14:16 In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways.

God punishes evil.

Psalms 81:11-12 “But my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would not submit to me. 12 So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels.

God brings good out of evil.

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.

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, 28 to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

The most wicked and evil action ever committed on this earth was the betrayal of Jesus by Judas, and yet we know that God determined to use that wickedness to bring about the greatest good ever done on this earth.

Good Friday looked like a day when Satan and evil were winning, but on that day God was absolutely in total control. Everything Satan does always in some way works to further God’s perfect and good purposes and plans.

If the most wicked and evil event ever to occur in the universe could be turned to be redemptive and a great good then what comfort is it to our souls that the lesser adversities that we face can also be redemptive and for our good and our benefit in eternity.

God uses evil to test and discipline those he loves.

Remember Jesus’ temptation and how God disciplines us as sons because He loves us (Hebrews 12:4-12).

God will one day rescue and redeem His people from evil and will put an end to all evil.

We have to learn to hold some things in tension.

We are free moral agents who make decisions and choices, yet God sovereignly rules and overrules.

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

Terrible events are triggered by natural causes like earthquakes, volcanoes, hurricanes, and floods, but God rules and overrules.

God is sovereign and sin is a horrible reality. Man means some things for evil, but God means those evil things for good.

Humans under God's sovereign control sin and do evil, yet God is not the author of sin and evil and is the judge of it.

God's sovereignty and human responsibility are set side by side in Scripture without any blushing, and without any effort to resolve the apparent tension. They are to both realities.

We are to accept them both with reverence and humility.

Deuteronomy 29:29 The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

Romans 11:33-34 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?"

Application and conclusion.

I have said before that sound doctrine is a comfort and encouragement to all who believe. That couldn't be more true of the doctrine of God's divine providence over all the universe. What solace and relief it is to know that no matter what happens a good and wise God is over it all and in complete control of it all. In this thought we find rest for our souls.

Article 13 gives us an application and conclusion. It tells us how we should respond to this doctrine.

We can *take refuge and comfort* in God knowing whatever has happened in the past or will happen in the future is under His control. It doesn't matter if I can make sense of it or figure it out and understand the reason. My comfort comes not from me but from God and my complete trust in Him.

Do you think God has forgotten you or isn't concerned about your trivial issues? Do you think God has lost interest in your needs and concerns? Do you think God has left you high and dry? He could no more do that than forget Himself.

Our creator is also a shepherd who never abandons His sheep.

Our creator is also our redeemer, who causes all things to work for our redemption.

Our creator is also a Father who cares for us as His children.

Matthew 10:29-31 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30 But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

We don't have to fear a nuclear war or an asteroid hitting the earth or some nation wiping us out. God is in control and nothing will happen without His perfect wisdom and will, for His glory.

We don't have to be afraid of an event that defies explanation or seems to have no purpose whatsoever.

We can trust Him in every circumstance.

And consider this. Every new event or circumstance that comes alone and we have to face is a new call to trust God again. A new call to trust and obey knowing that this to must work for my spiritual and eternal good and benefit.

Circumstances and events that would drive an unbeliever farther away from God are the same events that drive the saints closer to God.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.
6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

We must respond with patience and humility as we trust and obey and wait upon the Lord.

Sometimes our paths are through or to green pastures, and sometimes they are through the narrow valley of the shadow of death. Some paths are easy, some hard, some last a short time, some a long time. Some make sense, some don't.

Our comfort, peace, hope and strength come from knowing and trust God. This is how saints have been able to sing in prison, and peacefully face the lions in the arena, and go under the surgeon's knife or wait in patient prayer for an answer.

This we know with certainty. There is a God and He has a plan and He will make our paths straight in His perfect time and will lead us safely home because we are His children and no one or nothing can snatch us from His hand.

Q.28. HOW DOES THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S CREATION AND PROVIDENCE HELP US?

A. We can be patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing will separate us from his love. All creatures are so completely in his hand that without his will they can neither move nor be moved.

Everything in history is moving toward a redemptive purpose, end and goal. The day is coming when the Son of God will return and put all His enemies under His feet, and will destroy death and put an end to sin and evil. All will be made right.

John 16:33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."