

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Video Lecture Series

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

STUDY GUIDE

Module 2:
THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

Lecture 12:
PROVIDENCE



The John Knox Institute
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Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Authorized King James Version.

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Module 2

The Doctrine of God

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Module 2: THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

Lecture 12: Providence

Introduction

If you know how to drive a car, you're familiar with that sense of control and responsibility. But we are only talking about one person and one vehicle. What about the universe as a whole? God sovereignly controls all things, at all times, in all places, from the microscopic world of cells and molecules, to large-scale matters like planets and galaxies, and every detail in between. This is what we call divine Providence.

Theme: *The doctrine of Providence—God's works of governing all his creatures and all their actions.*

I. Scriptural Basis

"And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honored him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Daniel 4:34–35)

1. Nebuchadnezzar was led to humble himself under God's hand. He turned from worshipping himself to bowing down and worshipping the Lord.
2. Nebuchadnezzar also confesses the absolute sovereignty of God, and proclaims his comprehensive work of providence.
3. Nebuchadnezzar confesses these doctrines, which he came to see the hard way, through his own humiliation.

Questions:

1. Read and meditate on the whole of Daniel chapter 4. What lessons can you draw from this chapter?

2. What does the doctrine of Providence reveal to us?

II. Doctrinal Overview

As summarized in *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 5, paragraph 1:

“God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.”

1. God executes his decrees both in the works of creation and providence.
2. God’s providence is comprehensive and all-encompassing.
3. God is immediately operative in every act of the creature. He has absolute control in predetermining the actions of men.
 - a. The first cause and the second causes.
 - b. God is in no way tied to using means (like miracles) to his end.
4. God’s purposes in our sufferings.
 - a. Trials expose our sins.
 - b. Trials also build godly character us.
 - c. Trials cause us to know God better.
 - d. Suffering produces fruit in our life, and prepares us for usefulness.
 - e. Trials lead the us to making God our all, and to prepare us for glory.
 - f. The Christian’s comfort in suffering.
 - g. We may be able to understand God’s providence in suffering.
5. Providence and the believer’s sin.
 - a. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 5, paragraph 5.
 - b. Divine purposes for God leaving us on our own for a season.
6. God’s providence and the reprobate.
 - a. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 5, paragraph 6.
 - b. God’s judicial hardening of sinners.

Questions:

1. Why do we say that the work of providence reveals to us who God is?

2. Does God govern and sustain everything in the universe completely? How do we know this from the Bible?

3. Since God has absolute control in predetermining the actions of men, what role does the creature have in determining their own actions?

4. How do we understand the occurrence of miracles in regards to God's providence?

5. Is God in control of the trials that come to believers? Why does the Lord providentially cause his people to suffer trials? What purpose do trials serve for the believer? Where do we see this in the Scripture?

6. What part does providence play in the believer's sin? What does *The Westminster Confession of Faith* teach about this? What are the purposes of these seasons?

7. How does the providence of God deal with the reprobate?

III. Polemical Exposition

Error 1: *There are those who believe that providence is merely God's foreknowledge.*

Error 2: *Deism.*

Error 3: *Fatalism.*

Questions:

1. How does the providence of God differ from God's foreknowledge? Explain each.

2. What is "deism" and what is the typical analogy used to explain it? How does this agree with the providence of God that is taught in the Scriptures?

3. Define “fatalism” and explain why it is contradictory to the Bible.

IV. Practical Exposition

1. The doctrine of Providence is a comforting doctrine.
2. The doctrine of Providence is a humbling doctrine.
 - a. It leads us to be dependent upon the Lord.

Questions:

1. Why do we say that the doctrine of Providence is a comforting doctrine?

2. How does Providence humble us? What does the Apostle Paul teach us about this doctrine in 1 Corinthians 4:7?

V. Self-Reflection

“Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” (James 5:10–11)

What does the doctrine of Providence teach you about trials that come to the believer? We often are quick to complain about our environment, or we even blame God. How does this doctrine encourage us to endure our trials with patience? We can cry out to God for help, but we should not complain against his providence. Have you ever experienced difficult times in your life? How did you go through those times? How can we be of help to others around us when they are suffering times of trouble?
