

**The 1689 Confession of Faith, Chapter 5 – “Of Divine Providence”, Session # 2 –  
“His Holy and Wise Preserving”, Presented in the Adult Sunday School Class, and  
presented by Pastor Paul Rendall on January 27<sup>th</sup>, 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)

**Paragraph 2** - Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass d) immutably and infallibly; so that there is not anything befalls any e) by chance, or without his providence; yet by the same providence he ordereth them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either f) necessarily, freely, or contingently.

d) Acts 2: 23; e) Proverbs 16:33; f) Genesis 8:22

**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.

**Louis Berkhof in his Systematic Theology says** – “The Idea of Providence – Providence may be defined as that continued exercise of the divine energy whereby the Creator preserves all His creatures, is operative in all that comes to pass in the world, and directs things to their appointed end. This definition indicates that there are three elements in providence, namely, preservation, concurrence or cooperation, and government. Calvin, the Heidelberg Catechism, and some of the more recent dogmaticians (Dabney, the Hodges, Dick, Shedd, McPherson) speak of only two elements, namely preservation and government.” “This does not mean, however, that they want to exclude the element of concurrence but only that they regard it as included in the other two as indicating the manner in which God preserves and governs the world.” I will go on to open up this definition of concurrence in a later session. Suffice it for us now, that we understand that Concurrence is the Divine energy being operative in all that comes to pass.

**Introduction – Today we want to think together of Divine Preservation in the sense of the comfort it brings to all of God’s people.**

**Psalm 121: 1-8** – “A Song of Ascents. I will lift up my eyes to the hills-- From whence comes my help? My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel Shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is your keeper; The LORD is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, Nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in From this time forth, and even forevermore.”

Why does the Psalmist say that he is lifting up his eyes to the mountains or the hills? It is because they are representative of the strength, the majesty, the power of God to be his helper. All of our real help comes from the Lord. It is He who has made heaven and earth, and because of that He can also help you. Notice all that God does by His Divine Providence in these verses. He will not allow your foot to slip or be moved. He will keep you and He will not slumber or sleep. He will be your shade at your right hand in protection from all the forces of nature, all the schemes of the Devil, all the plans and actions of persecuting men, all the forces that false religion will bring against you. He shall preserve you from all evil, and He will preserve or keep your soul. He will watch over you and preserve you whenever you go out and come in, and wherever you go out and come in, from this time forth, and forever. Now that, is comforting to know.

**1. The Doctrine of God’s Providence is designed by God to bring the Christian comfort and to promote His trust in His Loving Father God.**

**Nehemiah 9: 6** – “You alone are the Lord; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all.” “The host of heaven worships You.”

**John Trapp, the Puritan Commentator says this** – “Thou, even thou, art Lord alone] Jehovah is God’s incommunicable name; that holy and reverend name of his which Jews pronounce not, we too oft profane, at least by not considering the import of it; which is enough to answer all our doubts, and to fill us with strong consolation, had we but skill to spell all the letters in it.

Thou hast made heaven] With great skill and artifice thou hast made it, three stories high, 2Co\_12:2 Heb\_11:10.

The heaven of heavens] Called the highest, Luk\_2:14, and the third heaven, 2Co\_12:2. Of this heaven no natural knowledge can be had, nor any help by human arts, geometry, optics, &c.; for it is neither aspectable nor movable.

With all their host] i.e. Their furniture: angels, those heavenly courtiers, sun, moon, and stars, &c., which are all God’s servants, Psa\_119:91, and do, in their way, worship him.

The earth, and all things that are therein] God may be read in the great book of nature, which hath three leaves, heaven, earth, and sea. Heaven is all that is above earth. Earth is an element of cold and dry nature, thick, solid, heavy, placed in the midst of the world as the foundation thereof, and therefore unmovable, though round (and in that respect naturally apt for motion),

and though founded, not upon solid rocks, but fluid waters. This Aristotle himself wondered at, Lib. ii. de Caelo, cap. 13.

And all things that are thereon] Either therein, as metals and minerals; or thereon, as men, beasts, creeping things, &c.

The seas, and all that are therein] As, There is that leviathan, and creeping things innumerable. God's handiwork all of them.

And thou preservest them all] Givest them ζωην και πνοην, Act\_17:25, life and breath motion and maintenance; thou upholdest the whole creation by the word of thy power, and all things subsist by thy upholding, Heb\_1:3. God doth not cast off the care of his works that he hath made (as doth the carpenter, or shipwright), but being perpetually present with them, ruleth, disposeth, and ordereth all by a certain counsel, to his own ends, and at length to his own glory.

And the host of heaven worshippeth thee] Angels and saints especially; who the more they know of God the more they love him and honour him; making their addresses to him with greatest self-abasement, considering their distance and disproportion. Thus angels: as for saints: "All thy works praise thee, O God," saith David, that is, they give matter and occasion; "but thy saints bless thee," Psa\_145:10. How they do this, see Rev\_5:11-12.

## **2. God's Providence is based upon God's Infinite Wisdom and Power in upholding and preserving all things.**

**Let me give you an example of God's good providence in relation to life of Jonathan Edwards and the congregation that he pastored in Northampton, Massachusetts, in 1737.**

**He says this in Volume 4 of his works on the Great Awakening of that day** – "Tis worthy of our observation, that this great and surprising work does not seem to have taken its rise from any sudden and distressing calamity or public terror that might universally impress the minds of a people. Here was no storm, no earthquake, no inundation of water, no desolation by fire, no pestilence or any other sweeping distemper, nor any cruel invasion by their Indian neighbors, that might force the inhabitants into a serious thoughtfulness, and a religious temper by the fears of approaching death and judgment. Such scenes as these have sometimes been made happily effectual to awaken sinners in Zion, and the formal professor and the hypocrite have been terrified with the thoughts of divine wrath breaking in upon them, "Who shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" [Isaiah 33:14]. But in the present case the immediate hand of God in the work of his Spirit appears much more evident, because there is no such awful and threatening providence attending it.

It is worthy also of our further notice, that when many profane sinners and formal professors of religion have been affrighted out of

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their present carelessness and stupidity by some astonishing terrors approaching them, those religious appearances have not been so durable, nor the real change of heart so thoroughly effected: many of these sort of sudden converts have dropped their religious concerns in a great measure when their fears of the threatening calamity are vanished. But it is a blessed

confirmation of the truth of this present work of grace, that the persons who were divinely wrought upon in this season continue still to profess serious religion, and to practice it without returning to their former follies.

It may not be amiss in this place to take notice, that a very surprising and threatening providence has this last year attended the people of Northampton, among whom this work of divine grace was so remarkable: which providence at first might have been construed by the unthinking world to be a signal token of God's displeasure against that town, or a judgment from heaven upon the people; but soon afterwards, like Paul's shaking the viper off from his hand [Acts 28:1–6], it discovered the astonishing care and goodness of God expressed towards a place where such a multitude of his young converts were assembled: nor can we give a better account of it than in the language of this very gentleman, the Rev. Mr. Edwards, minister of that town, who wrote the following letter, which was published in New England.<sup>1</sup>

### **Northampton, March 19th, 1737**

We in this town, were the last Lord's Day the spectators, and many of us the subjects, of one of the most amazing instances of divine preservation, that perhaps was ever known in the land. Our meetinghouse is old and decayed, so that we have been for some time building a new one, which is yet unfinished. It has been observed of late, that the house that we have hitherto met in has gradually spread at bottom, the cells 2 and walls giving way, especially in the foreside, by reason of the weight of timber at top pressing on the braces that are inserted into the posts and beams of the house. It has so done more than ordinarily this

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spring; which seems to have been occasioned by the heaving of the ground by the extreme frosts of the winter past, and it's now settling again on that side which is next the sun; by the thaws of the spring: by this means the underpinning has been considerably disordered, which people were not sensible of, till the ends of the joists which bore up the front gallery, by the walls giving way, were drawn off from the girts on which they rested; so that in the midst of the public exercise in the forenoon, soon after the beginning of sermon, the whole gallery full of people, with all the seats and timber, suddenly and without any warning sunk, and fell down, with most amazing noise, upon the heads of those that sat under, to the astonishment of the congregation, the house being filled with dolorous shrieking and crying, and nothing else was expected than to find many people dead, and dashed to pieces.

The gallery in falling seemed to break and sink first in the middle, so that those who were upon it were thrown together in heaps before the front door. But the whole was so sudden, that many of them that fell knew nothing in the time of it what it was that had befallen them; and others in the congregation knew not what it was that had happened with so great a noise; many thought it had been an amazing clap of thunder. The falling gallery seemed to be broken all to pieces before it got down; so that some that fell with it, as well as those that went under, were buried in the ruins, and were found pressed under heavy loads of timber, and could do nothing to help themselves.

But so mysteriously and wonderfully did it come to pass, that every life was preserved; and though many were greatly bruised, and their flesh torn, yet there is not, as I can understand, one bone broke, or so much as put out of joint among them all. Some that were thought to be almost dead at first, are greatly recovered; and but one young woman seems yet to remain in dangerous

circumstances, by an inward hurt in her breast; but of late there appears more hope of her recovery.

There is none can give any account, or conceive by what means it should come to pass, that people's lives and limbs should be thus preserved, when so great a multitude were thus imminently exposed. It looked as though it was impossible it should be otherwise, than that great numbers should instantly be crushed to death or dashed in pieces: it seems unreasonable to ascribe it to anything else, but the care of providence in disposing the motions of every stick of timber, and the precise place of safety where everyone should sit and fall, when none were in any capacity to take care for their own preservation. The preservation seems to be most wonderful with respect to the women and children that were in the middle ally [aisle] under the gallery, where it came down first and with greatest force, and where was nothing to break the force of the falling weight.

Such an event may be a sufficient argument of a divine providence over the lives of men. We thought ourselves called to set apart a day to be spent in the solemn worship of God, to humble ourselves under such a rebuke of God upon us in the time of public service in God's house by so dangerous and surprising an accident; and to praise his name for so wonderful, and as it were miraculous a preservation; and the last Wednesday was kept by us to that end: and a mercy in which the hand of God is so remarkably evident, may be well worthy to affect the hearts of all that hear it.

### **Conclusion –**

Here in Paragraph 1 we see that God, the good Creator of all things, in His infinite power and wisdom upholds, directs, disposes and governs all creatures and all things. This statement is then linked to His infallible foreknowledge and the counsel of His own will in terms of the end for which each creature was created. This is no less true of man than any other of the creatures which God has made. It is really quite important to God that you as a Christian will receive this truth so that you will see that God does indeed have a purpose for your life in particular, whether you consider yourself the least of men, or if you realize that you have been given great natural gifts and great spiritual gifts. It is good for all of us here today to realize that God has infinite power and wisdom, and because this is true, it means that He is well able to uphold, direct and govern you and all men, and to deal with all the matters which concern you in particular; doing so to His own glory, and for your everlasting good if you are a believer in Christ. The doctrine of God's Providence will bring you great comfort, joy, and blessing to your mind and heart in all the activities, events, joys and sorrows, trials and blessings that will come to you in this life. Why? Because you will know, that all the things which God has ordered for your life, they will come to you from His good and gracious hand; and all the everlasting good will come to you because of what He has done for you in Christ, and conveys to you in blessings by His Holy Spirit. He will not turn away from doing you good all the days of your life, for you are trusting in God and in His Son Jesus Christ.