

LD 10; Dan. 4:34-37; Rom. 11:34-35; The Providence of God I. The Doctrine of Providence II. The Benefits of Providence

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, do you really believe that God controls everything? Not only that He knows everything, but that He controls everything as well. That He knows the number of hairs on your head- and controls where each one falls? Knowing all and controlling all is not quite the same thing. You can know something while remaining unable to control it. So today as we take up our study of providence, it is important to see how comforting this doctrine can be. There are many people in the churches today that believe that God is simply open to the future. Because God does not want to force people to believe, He simply offers the gospel to them and leaves the choice up to them. So God is open to the idea of people believing, but not in control of those who do. This applies to difficulties as well- in the Open Theism concept, God is not in control of evil- bad things happen and God is grieved by it. Not wanting to interfere or intervene- He allows bad things to happen and does not hold these evils in check. That teaching is not very comforting at all! If God is like us- simply taking things as they come- what assurance do we have that God will have victory of sin and hell in the end? In making God more like us, we end up stripping ourselves of any lasting comfort! But the doctrine of God's providence is a uniquely Biblical doctrine- and the sovereignty of God has been celebrated within the Reformed Church for ages. So today we consider this theme: Jesus Christ reveals the sovereignty of God for the lasting comfort of His people.

I. The Doctrine of Providence

In our first point, we simply set out this doctrine by explaining what we mean- and what we do not mean- when we speak of God's providence. Providence is a work of God- it is not a god in itself. In the past you might be able to find the writings of old that speak of Providence as if it were a power or work in and of itself. In this way, Providence was spoken of more like fate or destiny. But the doctrine of providence must not be separated from the God who works- who performs this act of providing and watching over all. Of to say this another way- we should not confuse God and His work! So providence is not fate or chance- nor do we speak of luck or finding your number in the stars. Horoscopes and tarot cards are not how we should look for

direction or seek answers concerning the future. Rather, we believe that God continues His work after creation in His divine providence. Now as QA 27 explains, providence is the almighty, ever-present power of God by which all things come about. God's continued care for creation covers everything and is seen everywhere. It is the work of the almighty God. We confess that God has revealed Himself as all knowing and all powerful. Omnipresent and omnipotent. But He also always working- as Jesus said in John 5- My Father is working until now and I am working. So the Father and the Son continue their work- even after creation- and that work is to sustain all things in accordance with what He has ordained. So nothing can happen unless the LORD allows- nothing can fall upon us unless the LORD sends. As we read in Dan. 4:35, who can say to the LORD, what have you done? Who can resist God's hand? No one! Even the Devil must ask for permission before he acts as we find in the book of Job. So this power of God covers all things- and lasts for all time. As our Catechism answer puts so beautifully- God upholds the heaven and earth and all creatures. Nothing falls outside of His view- and no creature falls outside of His care! So this work of God covers all creatures- high and low. Big and little. Near and far. The great sea creatures of the depths- the soaring birds in the heights! The movement of planets and stars. The storms that rage on Jupiter and over Florida! In covering all things- it means that God's providence includes everything that happens. Both good and ill- easy and hard- everything comes from Him. Although we sometimes like to say that God allowed this to happen- it is also true that God specifically sends everything that happens. Amos 3:6 says- no disaster comes to a city unless the LORD has done it! As the Catechism puts it – fruitful and lean year, sickness and health, prosperity and poverty. All these are His design and part of His plan- they are products of His hand. Remember the dreams that Joseph interpreted- the fruitful and lean years were God's design. Your health is not in the hands of the doctor- but rather it is in the hands of your heavenly Father. Your financial success not at mercy of the stock market, but rather from the Father of Light who is the fountain and source of every good and perfect gift. So God upholds and rules over all things- determining the place and position of each creature. As Psalm 145 says, all creatures are fed from Him hand. And in Acts 17- the times and place of each man is determined by His design. In Him we live and move and have our being. In fact, God uses providence to move His people where He wants them

to be- as seen in the life of Joseph. But before we move into our second point, we have to keep in mind what the doctrine of God's providence does not mean. Even though God is in control of all things- sends all things- and ordains all that happens- this fact does not make God the author of Sin nor can we charge God with wrong doing when hardships come. This point is made in James 1- God does not tempt nor can God be charged with wrong. When we remember that God created everything good- and that He is bringing all things to a good end for His people- we must refrain from accusing God of somehow wronging us. We cannot lay a charge against God- and dare not raise our fist at God when times are difficult. This is what Job learned in Job 40, after speaking out against God and arguing with Him, Job learned his place and he put his hand over his own mouth. I am of small account, what shall I answer to you- Job said. So although we may not understand, we must be careful not to accuse God or argue against His plan. He is and remains our loving, heavenly Father! In fact, one of the distinct purposes and application of God's providence is the humble the proud. We read of this in Dan. 4- God in His providence humbled Nebuchadnezzar so that this king was forced to say- the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing. The Lord does according to His will and none can resist or say- what have you done! So the providential working of God is used to humble the proud- but it's truth also gives comfort to the humble and discouraged!

II. The Benefits of Providence

Now that we have considered the content of this doctrine, in our next point we look at the benefits. The catechism was written to be extremely pastoral. Knowing that God is in control of all things is a comforting truth- that is if God is your God and Father. If you did not know anything about the ruler of the universe- I don't suppose it would be very comforting to know that He was in control. The question would be- what kind of a ruler is he? But imagine for a moment that you lived in a country with a president who was not only extremely kind- but that this president was also your friend! Well, our heavenly Father loves us and is closer than any friend. Knowing that this heavenly Father- the Father of Jesus and the Father of the church- knowing that He is sitting on the throne and ruling over all is a truth that benefits! So the Catechism gives us 3 areas in which to draw comfort- times of adversity, times of prosperity, and times of uncertainty. So first of all,

knowing that trials and hardships are a part of God's plan for us will cause us to be patient. Patient in adversity. When the road is difficult and the times are hard. So during the cancer treatment, surgery and broken bones- we say it is well with my soul. I know that these things have a purpose- will be used to a good end- and will somehow serve the divine purpose of our loving Father. And in times of conflict, sorrow over the death of a loved one, broken relationship and financial loss- we know that God sees and He knows what is best! He will address each need and in the end all will be well! If nothing can separate us from the love of Christ- then in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who love us as Rom. 8 explains. Notice how Paul acted while unjustly chained in prison. In Acts 16, he and Silas spend the night singing and praying to God. Only someone who committed their lives to the LORD could patiently and even joyfully accept this trial from the Lord's hand. Now to be clear, this is not to say that we should be stoic. We are not dualist- where we just pretend that nothing really matters. No, we know that God is with us in the trials and He is working through this hardship for a reason! We also have the certain knowledge that in the end, Jesus will make all things right! So we have a loving God who catches our tears in this life- and who will wipe away our tears in the life to come. It is for that reason that we can be patient- as we wait for God to finish His work and to make all things beautiful in His time! Now how do we know that God is for us- that He is working all for our good? Well, Rom. 8 explains that God works all for the good of those who are called according to His purpose. So if God has called you- if the Holy Spirit dwells within you- if Jesus Christ's blood has cleansed you from all your sins- then you can have the certain comfort of coming good! No matter what this world may look like- you know that good is in store for you because Jesus has purchased your entrance into God's loving family! Next, confessing that God's hand of providence is at work in times of prosperity, we have be thankful! When we know that anything good is a gift from the Father of Lights- from the fountain of all good- our hearts will not hesitate to acknowledge and give Him thanks. So after a successful surgery, healed bones, cancer in remission, and other good news- we rightly identify the giver of these gifts. With the joys of being a parent, the blessings of laughter and new friends. The freedom to worship, spiritual growth and church fellowship. When you are rewarded at work and blessed in the field. Then you think not of your own wisdom, you praise

not the doctors or your own insight- but all glory goes to the One who deserves it! And then we have confidence for our future. In times of uncertainty- when we do not know what will come and what the future will hold- we retain our good confidence in our God's goodness and control. I know that nothing can separate me from God's love. No one can snatch me from Jesus' hand. No height nor depth can remove me from the place God has set me. Just as all things are in His hands- so I also know that apart from His will nothing can move nor be moved. All must and all will work together for my good and for my God's glory. Again, this is a statement of faith- this is the confident trust that a child has in their Father who is all knowing. Nothing can sneak up on God or catch Him by surprise. All powerful- nothing can stop His hand or thwart His plan. Living in times of uncertainty- no knowing what will happen- is always hard. What will the test results reveal? What will happen to my job? Will my children find good friends? We all have a measure of uncertainty in our lives. We don't know what the future holds. But as God's people, we need not be afraid! We need not worry or fret- because the future is known by our God! He controls and ordains all! Both our big events and small decisions are in His hand! So we can move forward with the confidence of children who are held in the arms of a loving Father! Yes, the waters may rise and the fires may burn- but I am in the arms of a loving God and Saviour! As it has often been said, I may not know the future- but I know He holds the future! So we do not need to know what our future holds, or what tomorrow will bring. Because our God is in control and He is our Loving Father!

As we close, we remember that Providence is simply describing how our sovereign God continues to control and sustains all that He has made. Jesus Christ reveals the sovereignty of God for the lasting comfort of His people. Knowing that God is and will remain in control is a comforting truth- no matter what our life may hold in store for us! We are not at the mercy of chance or blind luck- but rather we are firmly in the hands of a loving Father who provides for His children.