

Lecture 6- Providence**Prayer**

Grant, Almighty God, that since we are here exposed to so many evils, which suddenly arise like violent tempests, O, grant, that with hearts raised up to heaven, we may yet acquiesce in Thy hidden providence and be so tossed here and there, even though we are so tossed here and there according to the judgment of our flesh, yet to remain fixed in this truth, that Thou wouldst have us believe, that all things are governed by Thee and that nothing takes place except through Thy will, so that in the greatest confusions we may always clearly see Thy hand and that Thy counsel is altogether right and perfectly and singularly wise and just; and may we ever call upon Thee and flee to this port, that we are tossed here and there in order that Thou mayest nevertheless always sustain us by Thine hand until we shall at length be received into that blessed rest which has been procured for us by the blood of Thine only begotten Son. Amen.

Providence**I. Definition of Providence**

- A. More than foreknowledge - government (1, 16, 4)
- B. More than permission - direction (1, 16, 8; 1, 18, 3; cf. also, 1, 14,17; 3, 23, 8)
- C. More than general - particular (1, 16, 5; 1, 16, 7)
- D. More than nature - man (1, 16, 8)
- E. Not fate - providence
- F. Summary: God's providence is his watchful, effective, active, ceaseless, total, detailed, personal, loving, wise, and holy governing of this world.

II. Application of Providence

- A. How does God's providence work?
 - 1. Sometimes through an intermediary; sometimes without an intermediary; sometimes contrary to an intermediary
 - 2. But it is always God who works (1, 16, 2; 1, 16, 7)
- B. What does God's providence do?
 - 1. Reveals "his concern for the whole human race" (1, 17, 1)
 - 2. "But especially his vigilance in ruling the church" (1, 17, 1)
- C. How Much Can We Understand?
 - 1. Limited understanding (1, 16, 9; 1, 17, 1)
 - 2. But not totally mysterious
 - 3. So we must "cherish moderation" (1, 17, 1) and "reverently adore" (1, 17, 2)
- D. What is the effect of the doctrine of God's providence in our lives?
 - 1. No easy, superficial optimism
 - 2. No irresponsibility or imprudence (1, 17, 4 & 5)
 - 3. But gratitude of mind for the favorable outcome of things; patience in adversity; and incredible freedom from worry about the future (1, 17, 7; 1, 17, 10)

See Appendix D for an "Exercise in Providence."

III. The Problem of Providence

- A. God directs and governs everything (1, 18, 3)
- B. God is not the author of sin; man is responsible (1, 18, 4)
 - 1. We know that God uses evil without being the author of evil (1, 17, 5; 1, 18, 4; *Commentary on 2 Corinthians [12:7]*)
 - 2. We don't know how God uses evil without being the author of evil

- C. God is omnipotent (he directs everything); God is good (he forbids sin). Does God then have two wills?
1. God's will appears "manifold to us" (1, 17, 2) [preceptive will and decretive will]
 2. But there is a single ("simple") will, even though there is a depth ("another hidden will" [1, 17, 2]) which we cannot fathom (cf. John Murray, p. 69)
 - a. Contradiction? (1, 17, 5)
 - b. Mystery? (1, 18, 3)
- D. Faith is necessary to believe both aspects.

For Further Study

See Calvin's *A Defense of the Secret Providence of God* (1558).

Murray, J. *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960.
A valuable treatment on the topic, "Calvin on the Sovereignty of God," pp. 55-71.