

**The Theology of the Westminster Standards**  
**WCF 5.1–4 – God’s Providence (Part 1)**

**I. Providence Defined**

- A. *“God’s providence is His watchful, effective, active, ceaseless, total, detailed, personal, loving, wise, and holy governing of this world.”* – David Calhoun
- B. WSC Q. 11. *What are God’s works of providence?* A. God’s works of providence are his most holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.
- C. HC Q. 27. *What do you mean by the providence of God?* Answer: The almighty and everywhere present power of God; whereby, as it were by his hand, he upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, and all things come, not by chance, but by his fatherly hand.

**II. Review WCF 5.1–2**

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. (WCF 5.1)

- A. **Psalm 115:3** – *“Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.”*
- B. **Acts 17:25–26** – *“... he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. <sup>26</sup> And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place.”*
- C. **Gen 45:7–8** – *“And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. <sup>8</sup> So it was not you who sent me here, but God.”*

Although, in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first Cause, all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly; yet, by the same providence, he ordereth them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently. (WCF 5.2)

- D. **Psalm 104:14** – *“You cause the grass to grow ...”*
- E. **Rom 10:14–15** – *“And how are they to hear without someone preaching? <sup>15</sup> And how are they to preach unless they are sent?”*
1. “Necessarily” = second causes that are regular, ordinary, and inevitable (e.g., the sun for light)
  2. “Freely” = second causes involving the voluntary choice of creatures, whose wills are not violated, even though they fulfill God’s predetermined purpose (e.g., Cyrus’ conquest of Babylon serving God’s purposes for Israel; Is 10:6–7).
  3. “Contingently” = second causes that occasionally produce a “fortuitous” effect, all by God’s design (e.g., Ahab’s death in battle “by chance” fulfilling Micaiah’s prophecy; 1 Kings 22:28, 34)

### III. WCF Chapter 5.3 – God’s Use of Means

God, in his ordinary providence, maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at his pleasure. (*WCF 5.3*)

- A. What are some examples of the means God has used in your life? To what end?
- B. What are some biblical examples of God’s working “without means”?
- C. What about “above” means (where God uses normal means, but they produce an unexpected effect)? What about “against” means?

### IV. WCF Chapter 5.4 – God’s Use of Means

The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God so far manifest themselves in his providence, that it extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men; and that not by a bare permission, but such as hath joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering, and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to his own holy ends; yet so, as the sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin. (*WCF 5.4*)

- A. Compare 2 Sam 24:1 and 1 Chron 21:1
  1. **2 Sam 24:1** – *“Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, ‘Go, number Israel and Judah.’”*
  2. **1 Chron 21:1** – *“Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel.”*
- B. **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, <sup>28</sup> to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.”*
- C. “Balancing” Texts
  1. **1 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.”*
  2. **Ezek 18:23** – *“Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?”*

*“Calvinism ... takes full account of the seriousness of life, champions the rights of the Lord of lords, and humbly bows in adoration before the inexplicable sovereign will of God Almighty ... Calvinism comforts us by saying that in everything that happens, it recognizes the will and hand of an almighty God, who is also a merciful Father. While Calvinism does not offer a solution, it invites us humans to rest in him who lives in unapproachable light, whose judgments are unsearchable, and whose paths are beyond tracing out.”*

– Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:394–95