

**The Theology of the Westminster Standards**  
**WCF 5.6–7 – God’s Providence (Part 3)**

*“It is the apex of Christian piety to trust in God, just as it is also the foundation, to say, ‘I do not know, but I do know that God does.’ Christian piety leaves unresolved problems in the hand of God, remembering that, if we knew all, then we would be as God, and worship and adoration would be at an end. Clouds and darkness are round about him but justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne” – John Murray*

**I. WCF 5.1–7 “At a Glance”**

A. Section 1 – The Nature, Universal Scope, and Ultimate Goal of Providence

1. *“God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures ... to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.”*

B. Section 2 – God’s Providence in Relation to Himself and to the Universe

1. *“... in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first Cause, all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly; yet ... he ordereth them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes ...”*

C. Section 3 – God’s Ordinary Providence in the Use of Means

1. *“God, in his ordinary providence, maketh use of means ...”*

D. Section 4 – God’s Providence Over the Fall and Sins

1. *“... it [providence] extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men ...”*

E. Section 5 – God’s Providence and the Sins and the Temptations of Christians

1. *“... God doth oftentimes leave, for a season, his own children to manifold temptations, and the corruption of their own hearts ...”*

F. Section 6 – God’s Providence and the Sins of the Ungodly

1. *“As for those wicked and ungodly men whom God, as a righteous Judge, for former sins, doth blind and harden ... whereby it comes to pass that they harden themselves ...”*

G. Section 7 – God’s Providential Care for His Church

1. *“... after a most special manner, it [i.e., God’s providence] taketh care of his church ...”*

*“No definition of providence so exact and so comprehensive as this can be found elsewhere in Protestant symbolism [i.e., confessions].”<sup>1</sup> – Edward D. Morris, *Theology of Westminster Symbols* (1900), 216.*

**II. Setting the Stage**

- A. God’s challenge to idol worshippers in Isaiah 41:21–24
- B. R.C. Sproul teaching on the *WCF*

### III. WCF 5.6 – God’s Providence and the Sins of the Ungodly

As for those wicked and ungodly men whom God, as a righteous Judge, for former sins, doth blind and harden, from them he not only withholdeth his grace whereby they might have been enlightened in their understandings, and wrought upon in their hearts; but sometimes also withdraweth the gifts which they had, and exposeth them to such objects as their corruption makes occasions of sin; and, withal, gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and the power of Satan, whereby it comes to pass that they harden themselves, even under those means which God useth for the softening of others.” (WCF 5.6)

- A. Dr. Chad Van Dixhoorn writes, “*God can work evil for good, but he also withholds good and, in a sense, even works good for evil. That is the sad but true message of paragraph six.*” What does he mean by God’s “work[ing] good for evil”? What does Dr. Van Dixhoorn (surely!) not mean?
1. **2 Cor 2:15–16** – “*For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing,<sup>16</sup> to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.*”
- B. The Hardening of Pharaoh
- a. **Ex 4:21** (God to Moses) – “*And the Lord said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.”*
  - b. **Ex 7:13** – “*Still Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said.*”
  - c. **Ex 8:32** – “*But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and did not let the people go.*”
- C. The “Handing Over” of Unbelievers
1. **Rom 1:22, 24** – “*For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened ...<sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves ...*”

### IV. WCF 5.7 – God’s Providential Care for His Church

As the providence of God doth, in general, reach to all creatures; so, after a most special manner, it taketh care of his church, and disposeth all things to the good thereof. (WCF 5.7)

- A. What comfort is it to you that God has no higher purpose than the revelation of His glory in the glorification of the church?
1. **Eph 1:22–23** – “***And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,***<sup>23</sup> *which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*”