

Class 2, Categories and Propositions of Divine Providence

Daniel 4:35, "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have you done?'"

Psalms 135:5-7, "For I know that the Lord is great and that our Lord is above all gods. Whatever the Lord pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps. He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; who makes lightnings for the rain, who brings forth the wind from His treasures."

Thomas Watson on Divine Providence:

The following are four categories that make-up the doctrine of providence:

1. The sovereignty and exaltation of the Person of God
 - 1) We cannot have God controlling all things for our good without God's total sovereignty.
 - 2) We cannot claim the comfort of God's watchcare if there is anything outside of God's control.
 - 3) If anything is outside of God's control, then we cannot have a God the way the Bible teaches about the living and true God.
2. The righteous and just oversight of and intervention in human history and the earth
 - 1) In understanding the reality and nature of evil, we must not dismiss Providence, because in doing so, we dismiss God and our only comfort.
 - 2) Providence in human history and in the entire earth relates to God's saving will being applied to all people and the full application of God's kingdom on earth.
 - 3) Ultimately, nothing is left out of God's will.
3. Providence guided by God's eternal decrees for God's glory
 - 1) Providence is not guided by random chance or arbitrary choice.
 - 2) Providence is anchored in the eternal decrees of God, manifesting God's will.
 - 3) Providence includes the intricate and inevitable weaving of God's will applied to God's creation and elect.
4. Providence manifests divine goodness and wisdom
 - 1) Providence requires that we believe in divine wisdom and goodness.
 - 2) In Providence divine wisdom and goodness invades all aspects of history.

Thomas Watson, "Body of Divinity" (following along with the Westminster Catechism) (following is selected quotations from "Body of Divinity", pp. 119ff)

Q – "What are God's works of Providence?"

A – "God's works of providence are the acts of His most holy, wise, and powerful government of His creatures, and of their actions."

Watson expands nature, character, and meaning of providence: (Italic print is Watson's statements)

1. *There is a providence. There is no such think as blind fate, but there is a providence that guides and governs the world. Proverbs 16:33 says, "The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord."*
2. *What this providence is...I (Watson) answer, Providence is God's ordering all issues and events of things, after the counsel of His will, to His own glory.*
 - 1) DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DIVINE DECREES AND DIVINE PROVIDENCE: *I call providence God's order things, to distinguish it from His decrees. God's decree ordains things that shall fall out; God's providence orders them (in keeping with God's decrees).*
 - 2) PROVIDENCE ORDERS THINGS IN KEEPING WITH GOD'S WILL: *I call providence the ordering of things after the counsel of God's will.*
 - 3) PROVIDENCE ORDERS THINGS IN KEEPING OF GOD'S WILL FOR GOD'S GLORY: *God orders all events of things, after the counsel of His will, to His own glory, His glory being the ultimate end of all His actings, and the center where all the lines of providence meet. The providence of God is Regina mundi, 'the queen and governess of the world': it is the eye that sees and the hand that turns all the wheels in the universe.*

Watson gives Propositions about God's providence.

- 1) UNIVERSAL AND ABSOLUTE: *God's providence reaches to all places, persons, and occurrences.*
 - a. *Some say, 'There are many things done in the world which are very disorderly and irregular; and surely God's providence is not in these things.'*
 - b. *(Watson answers) Yes, the things that seem to us irregular, God makes use of to His own glory...The providences of God seem to us to be very crooked and strange, yet they all carry on God's work (Refer to Thomas Boston's book, "The Crook in the Lot")...God's people are sometimes low...God comes with a humbling providence to afflict them...But better is the loss that makes them humble than the success that makes them proud...If it were always sunshine we should see no stars; so, if we should have always prosperity, it would be hard to see the acting of men's faith. Thus, you see God's providences are wise and regular, though to us they seem very strange and crooked...Sometimes God makes use of the wicked to protect and shield His church; and sometimes to refine it and purify it...Augustine says well, 'We are beholden to wicked men, who against their wills do us good.'*
 - c. *But some will say, if God has a hand in ordering all things that fall out, He has a hand in the sins of men.*
 - d. *(Watson answers) No, by no means, He has no hand in any man's sin. God cannot go contrary to His own nature, He cannot do any unholy action, any more than the sun can be said to be darkened. Here you must take heed of two things; as you must take heed of making God non-participatory in men's sins. Is it likely that God is the author of sin and the avenger of it? God in His providence permits men's sins...if He could bring good out of it...The Lord is pleased to permit it, but He has no hand in sin.*
- 2) PROVIDENCE DOES NOT ALWAYS SEEM PROVIDENTIAL: *Providences that are casual and accidental to us, are pre-determined by the Lord...Things that seem to fall out casual, and by chance, are the issues of God's decrees, and the interpretation of His providential will.*

- 3) PROVIDENCE NOT AN EXCUSE FOR NEGLECT OR DISOBEDIENCE: *God's providence is to be greatly to be observed, but we are not to make it the rule of our actions...Providence is the Christian's diary, but not his Bible. (Watson is saying here that we are not to simply wait for God to do something providentially, but rather, we are to be faithful and obedient to the Lord by keeping His Word)*
- 4) PROVIDENCE IS IRRESISTIBLE: *God's providence is irresistible. There is no standing in the way of God's providence to hinder it. When God's time was come for Joseph's release, the prison could hold him no longer. (God's providence is perfect and unstoppable as to goal, time, and means)*
- 5) FAITH TRUSTS PROVIDENCE: *God is to be trusted when His providences seem to run contrary to His promises...David was pursued by Saul, and was in danger of his life, but all this while it was David's duty to trust God. Pray observe that the Lord by cross providences often brings to pass His promise...Trust God when providences seem to run quite contrary to promises.*
- 6) PROVIDENCE ON EARTH IS MIXED WITH TROUBLE: *God's providences are checked and intermingled. In the life to come there shall be no more mixture...in this life the providences of God are mixed, there is something of the sweet in them and something of the bitter.*
- 7) PROVIDENCE TURNS WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN BAD INTO GOOD: *The same action, as it comes from God's providence may be good, and as it comes from men may be evil.*

Application of divine providence to life (Watson's application he calls "uses")

- 1) ADMIRE GOD'S PROVIDENCE AND GIVE HIM PRAISE: *Admire God's providence – If God's providence should be withdrawn but for a while, creatures would be dissolved...Without this wise providence of god there would be anxiety and confusion in the whole world...The providence of God infuses comfort and virtue into everything we enjoy.*
- 2) QUIETLY SUBMIT WITHOUT COMPLAINT TO GOD'S PROVIDENCE: *Learn to quietly submit to divine providence – Do not murmur at things that are ordered by divine wisdom...It is a sin as much to quarrel with God's providence as to deny His providence. If men do not act as we would have them, they shall act as God would have them. His providence is His master-wheel that turns these lesser wheels, and God will bring His glory out of all at last...It may be, we think sometimes we could order things better if we had the government of the world in our hands; but alas! Should we be left to our own choice we should choose those things that are hurtful for us...Let us be content that God should rule the world; learn to acquiesce to His will and submit to His providence...God's providences may sometimes be secret, but they are always wise...we should learn to be silent under His displeasure.*
- 3) FOSTER THE CONVICTION THAT GOOD WILL COME FROM PROVIDENCE: *You that are Christians, believe that all God's providence shall conspire for your good at last. The providences of God are sometimes dark, and our eyes dim, and we can hardly tell what to make of them; but when we cannot un-riddle providence, let us believe that it will work together for the good of the elect. Romans 8:28. The wheels in a clock seem to move contrary one to the other, but they help forward the motion of the clock...so the providences of God seem to be cross wheels; but for all that, they shall carry on the good of the elect....so,*

affliction in itself is not joyous, but grievous; but the Lord turns it to the good of His saints. Poverty shall starve their sins, and afflictions shall prepare them for a kingdom. Therefore, Christians, believe that God loves you, and that He will make the most cross providences to promote His glory and your good.

- 4) LET PROVIDENCE CONQUER YOUR FEAR: *Let it (providence) be an antidote against immoderate fear, that nothing comes to pass but what is ordained by God's decree, and ordered by His providence...Let us not make things worse by our fear. Men are limited in their power, and cannot go one hair's breadth further than God's providence permits.*
- 5) LET PROVIDENCE INSPIRE THANKFULNESS: *Let the merciful providence of God cause thankfulness. We are kept alive by a wonderful-working providence.*
- 6) REMEMBER PROVIDENCE APPLIES TO CHRIST'S CHURCH: *Think with comfort about providence as it applies to the church of God. Those who think totally about ruining the church must do it in a time when it is neither day nor night, for the Lord keeps it (the church) by His providence night and day...God saves His church strangely by (1) giving unexpected mercies to His church, when she looked for nothing but ruin; and, (2) by saving it in the very way we think He will destroy it. God works sometimes by contraries. He raises His church by bringing it low. (Watson refers to Exodus 1:12, concerning the Egyptians persecuting the Hebrews, "The more they afflicted them the more they multiplied"), and (3) strangely, the Lord even makes His enemies do His work.*
- 7) WE WILL BETTER UNDERSTAND GOD'S PROVIDENCE LATER ON IN GOD'S TIME AND WAY: *We often long for the time when the great mystery of God's providence will be fully unfolded and explained to us. Now we scarce know what to make of God's providence, and are ready to criticize what we do not understand; but in heaven we shall see how all His providences (sickness, losses, sufferings) contributed to our salvation. Here we see but some dark pieces of God's providence, and it is impossible to judge of His works by pieces; but when we come to heaven and see the full body and portrait of His providence drawn out into its lively colors, it will be glorious to behold. Then we shall see how all God's providences helped to fulfill His promises. There is no providence but we shall see a wonder or a mercy in it.*

NEXT CLASS: meditating on God's providence