

# Providence

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] I have limited voice in God's providence and so your handout is slightly larger than normal! Which is why it's taking longer to come through the machine. So the rule is if it's on the handout! You're reading it okay if it's not on the handout i'm going to say it and so that's going to save me some voice let me pray as we begin let me pray father we do thank you that all things are in your hands thank you that that extends to us this evening and we pray for your blessing and your help as we look at your word and we pray that our our thoughts and meditations and our discussions together would be useful to us and bring glory to you in Jesus name amen now if you've been with us on these Sunday evenings say sammy needs one over here um i think that is thank you that would help me yeah so we've not got one either oh yeah right uh we've been working our way through the 1689 london baptist confession of faith and i i should say and this is an important caveat which um i hope has been clear um but i'm going to say anyway is that the 1689 baptist confession is not the bible right and it's not to be held in parallel with the bible um if i've given you the impression that it should be um that was not my intention you know when you when you open the bible and read it you are encountering god for yourself um those are his words they are inspired by him it is through those words that the spirit uh brings us to encounter god himself you know i i think you can fairly say that there is a direct connection between your health and maturity as a christian and your engagement with the word of god um it's not the only mark of health but it is an essential mark of health you cannot be healthy without regularly and consistently engaging with god's word um so that's that's crucial you can be a healthy and mature christian without regularly engaging with the baptist 1689 confession of faith okay um and i just want to make that clear um how well you know the 1689 confession is not necessarily a sign of how healthy or mature you are as a christian but that doesn't mean it's not important and i just want to give you a few reasons or three reasons uh why it is important the first reason is it is not the product of one person's thinking your theological position and your ideas on these things is often just the product of your own thinking um but that is not the same with the baptist confession of faith in fact because it's so closely connected with the westminster confession of faith the savoy declaration and it means that scholars from a wide spectrum of church backgrounds have thought that this is a good way of articulating the truth of god's words and so it means that the truths of the confessions are recognized by a number of christians from across the spectrum so anglicans baptists independence charismatics would all view the confessions in a high regard as a description of um of their faith secondly is these theological positions have stood the test of time right my theological position has lasted only the years that i've been a christian which isn't really very long compared to the confessions and the writers were trying to to summarize doctrines of the church in a way which was useful to the

church and has proved to be useful to the church for generations and generations so much so now you cannot write a church statement of faith without engaging with these historic confessions you don't have to replicate them but you do at least have to engage with them because these are really the sort of barometer or they have set the mark for how we describe what it is that we believe and so they have stood the test of time thirdly it's worth saying that they also come from the fires of persecution what i mean is that these confessions are written by people for whom getting these things right and articulating them properly costs them very dearly you and i can probably believe what we like on some of the things in the 1689 confession of faith with very little consequence for us personally it you know we even as a church we have a breadth of opinion on some of the issues that are uh raised by the 1689 confession of faith and that's good and it's right and and we've seen that over these evenings but for the people writing this not just the 1689 confession but the other ones as well standing by those truths cost them their livelihoods their homes their freedom even at

times their lives there was a lot more at stake you want to be really sure don't you that the doctrine that you're going to give your life for is stated truly and so that means that there is a sort of clarity to these statements where every word matters that you and i probably don't have when we're in conversation with one another about what we believe about called sovereignty because maybe we'll just think a bit less of each other if we don't describe it rightly now because of those three reasons i think when it comes to these statements of historical theology we should take them like teachers yeah they're not the bible but they are wise guides not infallible guides but wise guides and so proverbs 19 says this about listening to advice or instruction it says someone you see you didn't get the memo did you right okay if it's on the handout you say it not me listen to advice and accept this and at the end you will be counted among the wives great thank you yeah so we we listen don't we we engage with what it says and it we use it as a teacher to help us and the contrast to that is if you stop listening to instruction and you will stray from the words of knowledge and you'll wander away and so we are this evening being taught about divine providence not by infallible teachers but by teachers who are pointing us back to the word of god now the way to start i think is with a definition of the word providence perhaps you've heard the word providence used by christians it's uh it's the kind of thing that christians say isn't it you know oh it's all in god's providence and it sounds like a very spiritual thing to say but we might just assume that we know what we mean by that but let's try and drill down into a definition uh probably the the best way is to is to break it down not the word itself prov in dense uh actually i think it's a it's a latin meaning foresight isn't it probably pro and then something to do with vision um but that doesn't really help us theologians have divided up providence into three aspects of what they mean by god's providence the first one is this is when we say that god is provident we mean that he preserves the world that is that god doesn't just make the world and then clear off but rather that he is actively involved in the preservation of the sustaining of the keeping of the world so hebrews chapter one verse three someone other than clifford the sun is the radiance of god's glory and the exact representation of his being sustaining all things thanks mike so here the active involvement of god the sun in keeping the world sustaining all things by his powerful word so you can you can say can't you that um even the fact that this lectern stands up that the frailty of my voice is received by the frailty of your ears is only because god the sun by the power of his word is sustaining the universe in such a way that those things happen you know what we might call the laws of nature are really in fact the sustaining work of god in all things preserving and ordering and keeping the world so that's the first thing preservation next is about concurrence in other words that god's rule works alongside or concurrently with the responsibility and consequences of the actions of others we might call these in the confessions call these secondary causes that is they are not the ultimate cause of all things god alone is that but there are nevertheless secondary causes which are responsible for what happens you might call it and sometimes it's called cooperation but that can sometimes give the idea that you know these secondary causes are just on the same level as god's involvement which is not quite right the secondary cause might have a different end in mind to the end that god is working you know the the ends to which god is working in the burglaries that have happened in church this week is that we might love him and trust him more i guarantee that is different to the ends to which the burglars were working this week right so the ends are different but yet there is still cooperation or uh concurrence between those two actions secondary causes have that different end in mind but are submissive to the ultimate providential purpose of god robert strivens this is a longer one puts it like this someone want to read that for us okay the fatalists believe simply that what will be will be there is no point in looking left and right when you cross the road because if you are going to be run over by the bus that is what will happen and nothing you do or do not do will make any difference this is not biblical teaching or wise advice right just like i have to record here the bible makes very clear that humans have responsibility and that they make decisions and choices which have real effects in the world more broadly it is clear from scripture that as we all know one event really does cause another if i swing a bat to bring it into contact with a ball the ball will move that is not coincidence the two events are not unconnected one causes the other the causation is real without my sweeping the path there would have been no movement in the ball the confession calls these causes second causes to make clear that they are genuine causes so that they are secondary to the first cause which is the providence of god without which no bat would swing and no ball move first and second causes do not operate at the same level as second causes are themselves completely dependent upon the first cause god's problems they are nevertheless true causes human decisions and actions are thus significant and have real effects we

are responsible creatures great thank you lola so that's concurrence thirdly and finally um the definition includes government rule the idea that god is the first cause that he wills what will happen history is not random

his preservation and use of concurrence is for a purpose that he has in mind he is governing towards an end and so these uh three things work together and that is what providence is god's preservation of the world working concurrently with second causes to a purpose and a will of god in his governance over all things the heidelberg catechism summarizes it like this it asks first the question what do you understand by the providence of god and then the answer is and prayer is going to read this for us the answer is providence is the almighty and ever present power of god by which god upholds and as with his hand heaven and earth and all creatures and so rules that leaf and blade rain and drought fruitful and lean years food and drink health and sickness prosperity and poverty all things in fact come to us not by chance great there you go so this idea that god rules in all things in a fatherly caring way for his people so that you can say that whatever happens in your life has come to you by the fatherly hand of god however big or small significant or insignificant whether it's easy or whether it's difficult whether it's sickness or whether it's health whether it's prosperity or poverty they have come to you not by chance but by the will of god and the fatherly care of god who loves you and is involved in all things now before we go any further let's read that from the bible and i've got two questions and i think three passages so i want you to ask those two questions of the passage you might just choose one of them or you might go for a few of them so um you're going to read the passages and then do the questions what is the passage saying how does it affirm preservation concurrence and all government okay go for that in twos or threes around where you're sitting for a few moments okay let's um let's try working through these um what is the um matthew passage saying about god's providence so two sparrows sold for a penny what's what's it telling us yeah go on okay so it's a lesser to greater things and it's as if if god's sovereign care extends to sparrows do you not think it will extend to you also yeah um what about our proverbs it's the secondary yeah so every decision's from the lord but the not the still yeah yeah so there's a concurrence between the the lot the decision the lot makes you know whether you draw the short straw but actually the lord stands behind and over all things yeah i mean in the context of the book of proverbs there is not necessarily a suggestion that you roll a dice to answer every question that you have in life that's not what it's saying but it is saying that god's sovereign rule extends to essentially what we consider

chance happenings yeah yeah about the jeremiah passage was that more difficult yeah yeah so lola helpfully pointed out that i didn't define governance very well so well you asked me to cover so governance is the idea that god has an end in mind yeah all things in this world will be under the feet of christ who will rule and reign in glory for all eternity okay and god is working to that end he is governing for a reason and for a purpose and a goal yeah and saying you're absolutely right there is there is no area of our world over which god is not ruling like that so you you cannot go to a place or a time or a situation in which god is not ruling and reigning um which is brilliant isn't it absolutely fantastic um and then uh the acts passage this is incredible isn't it because in the acts passage god stands behind where every person lives in the world and his reason that they are there is that they might turn and seek him oh it's incredible isn't it god's providence and sovereign power over all things and every individual's lives yeah great let me try and anticipate three questions that you might have firstly what about sin it leaves you with a question doesn't it what about there is sin in the world how does that fit in with god's providence does god intend sin wickedness well let me say two true things and then one sort of conclusion from that true thing which does not answer the question but does at least give you a framework for thinking about it one god cannot sin right god is holy and without sin the bible is clear on that from the beginning to the end the second thing that's really clear in the bible is that sin cannot be god that what i mean by that is sin cannot be all-powerful sin cannot thwart god we don't live in a world where good and evil are fighting each other and we're not sure what the outcome is going to be we live in a world where god rules and reigns and his power is not thwarted by sin so sin must be weaker than god that leads you with the conclusion that sinful actions must be part of god's plan without him being sinful or sin being in charge so god's providence must extend to things which are sinful without god himself being responsible for those sinful things and god's intentions behind even those sinful actions is good for us and for his glory now that works out in a couple of ways doesn't it it means christians this is going to come as a shock to you but christians can sin you can sin i sin and god allows that intends that even not to thwart his purpose for my life but even to accomplish it that he might humble me that he

might teach me my need for jesus over and over and over again that the consequences of my sin might discipline

[ 20 : 18 ] me to return to the lord and also it works out in the lives of not christians as well who are allowed to reject christ and to face the consequences of that and to be judged for it now that doesn't answer everything about sin but i think those are really important sort of markers to lay down secondly what about miracles it leaves you with the question doesn't it that sometimes god sort of suspends or upends his normal providence or preservation of the natural order to do something extraordinary you can't have a doctrine of providence that doesn't also allow god the freedom to raise lazarus from the dead or part the sea or make the axe head floats interestingly at cs lewis in his book miracles argues that often what jesus is doing in his miracles is accelerating a natural process thus showing his power and providence over what we consider natural processes so for example wine comes from water right it just takes grapes and a lot of time but jesus is able to make wine from water like that why because he rules and reigns over what we call natural processes you know fish do spawn more fish normally that takes ages but jesus rules and reigns over that and is able to feed 5 000 and from speeding up what we consider natural processes finally though perhaps you're wondering what about how providence works differently in the life of a christian and a non-christian so one thing that becomes clear in the bible is that god's providence is of uh special reassurance to god's own people providence is taught in scripture to assure christians of his care for them in all of their lives god's fatherly care for his children romans 8 verse 28 says someone great now that doesn't mean that god doesn't preserve or uh cooperate and govern the lives of unbelievers but rather that there's not a promise that it's in the same sense for their good and in the same way god's providence might harden someone in their unbelief god's providence might take them away from the gospel not towards it now we don't and shouldn't speculate about how that works but providence in romans 8 28 is is taught to the christian to underline god's loving care for them that he is drawing them towards himself in all things he is intending for their good and their greatest christians now there we go providence preservation concurrence and government not thwarted by sin doesn't actually exclude the miraculous is at work in the lives of believers as a sign of god's care now then the 1689 confession chapter 5 divine providence states it like this and i think you should read those in your groups and then you can do the little questions at the end and you've got five minutes which is not very long but you can have a go and see how far we get in five or seven minutes and then we'll go okay sorry to interrupt your conversations um we're gonna we're gonna finish there um if you've got more questions or comments you can come

and ask me because i've almost lost all my voice just to end with this and um mike and later and i were just talking about this i thought this would be a really helpful way to end mark chapter 4 jesus in the boat in the storm how how do you know you've grasped the providence of god in your life in all things you are able to fall asleep in a boat in the storm right jesus in his humanity has as much to fear from that storm as any of those disciples the difference is that he by the spirit fully and wholeheartedly trust the providence of his father to know that nothing is going to happen to him outside of the father's will and he is able to sleep and brothers and sisters that's it for you and i isn't it that we are able to sleep in the storms of life because we know that our heavenly father rules and reigns in all things for our good and for his glory and nothing in my life not a hair will fall from my head although almost all of them have gone already without god's sovereign will and intention and that's great news isn't it so praise god let me pray as i close father thank you that you love us that you care for us and that all things in our lives are working for our good and your glory help us to trust you and rest in you every day of our lives we pray so help us especially tomorrow we ask that you would teach these things to our hearts that we might sleep trusting you and resting in you in jesus name amen amen