

Sing before the service: Psalm 72:10

Our help is in the Name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Beloved, grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Psalm of praise 118:12

Prayer

Psalm 62:4

Scripture reading: Deuteronomy 8

Scripture text: Deuteronomy 8:10-20; Catechism Lord's Day 10

This passage deals with the providence of God and what it requires of us. The providence of the Lord forms an important part of our confession. The Heidelberg Catechism, for example, contains a detailed description of providence.

Now we have to pay particular attention to the following.

- First, in this world only the church of the Lord confesses the Lord's providence.
- The unbelievers and false believers do not want to know anything about the providence of the Lord.
 - They do not want to know about a living and working God.
 - They also do not want to know anything about a God who does not stand at a distance but who is close by and manages and governs every person and literally everything that happens.

To have such a viewpoint is very dangerous and self-overestimating!

- The negation of God's providence simply means that such people are natural enemies of God.
- Their life and religion revolve around their own ingenuity, their own scientific perceptions and their own skills.

In contrast with these people we distinguish a second group.

- These people are greatly dependent on God.
- They are the church – members of the church of the Lord are those whose belief in God reflects their dependence on Him and who see themselves as being in God's hands.

This makes our confession so unique.

- This confession is linked tightly to what the Holy Spirit reveals to these people.
- Through the work of the Holy Spirit in them they can see God's precise way of caring for them and they can admire his greatness in his precision.

This confession is unique for another reason too. *Never has there been a religion that confessed that our existence and lives are governed by God's providence and his complete unchangeable will.*

The heathens of ancient times believed in many gods –polytheism.

- These gods worked against each other and, as a result, there was always a battle in heaven and the people had to bear the brunt.
- Also, since early times people, in their unbelief, have confessed fate.

- Fate (lot) is the negative power that can control what happens to people – how the lot is going to fall cannot be determined.

Gambling, still very well known today, is one of the oldest forms of negation of the providence of God.

- Gambling is one of the oldest forms of idol-worship. The stars or dice are used to clear up a person's affairs.
- These things are all supplements that Satan offers in the place of God's providence.

The uniqueness of the teaching of providence lies exactly in the fact that God Himself is unique.

- The Triune God has been from everlasting to everlasting and no other is like Him.
- This is exactly why we confess that everything is governed by God.
 - He has made everything that exists.
 - How can anything He has made, not be obedient to Him?

The Scriptures teach us about the providence of the Lord. Listen to Job 12:7-12:

But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind. Does not the ear test words as the tongue tastes food? (Job 12:7-11 NIV)

Here the Bible teaches us that God created everything and still upholds it. God is so omnipotent that he cares for everything individually.

- Isaiah 34:16 adds that the Lord still commands everything and He doesn't miss anything.
- God knows everything by its name and He remembers every one of them.

Look in the scroll of the LORD and read: None of these will be missing, not one will lack her mate. For it is his mouth that has given the order, and his Spirit will gather them together. (Isaiah 34:16 NIV)

So God governs the history through his providence. In Matthew 6:26-30 the Lord Jesus says that God takes care of every bird.

- They do not plant or harvest and they do not build barns, because God provides food for them.
- Look at the lilies in nature – look at how they grow; they do not work, but God makes them grow.

The fact that God does everything is clearly reflected in the order of all things. Paul also preaches it to the people in Listre.

- They should take note of the fact that God has given fruitful and barren years and rain when it has to rain (Acts 14:17).

Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy. (Acts 14:17 NIV)

Our dependence on God tells us all these. We also read it in Acts 17:26, 27.

- The Lord made all nations from one man.
- He determined the exact places where they should live and set the boundaries of their countries.

- The Bible tells us that the Lord made some of these people poets and He lets every one of us live.

God also reveals Himself to the heathens (Romans 1:19, 20).

- Since the creation of the world God's eternal power and his divine nature have been clearly seen and understood from what He has made.
- It is God's providence that is mentioned here.

Now we must also consider the content of the teaching of providence. This is that God cares for everything.

- It means that before the creation the Lord has planned exactly what would happen to everything and now the Lord takes care that it happens accordingly.
- Not only major things – it includes absolutely everything.
- The Lord is not only concerned about the great and exceptional things. He cares for everything – from the greatest to the most insignificant.
- Our every thought is in the hand of the Lord. Proverbs 21:1 (NIV):
The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it . . . wherever he pleases.
- In the same way the Lord decides what is to happen to nations. Psalm 33:10 (NIV):
The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples.
- Every bit of grass that grows, grows because the Lord planned it to grow (Psalm 104:14). In Psalm 104 we read that the Lord makes grass grow for the cattle to eat, and plants to be cultivated so that they would bring forth food for man.

Give a thought to the history of the prophets of the Old Testament and then specifically to the number of times they announced that it would stop raining.

- When the Lord decided that it would rain again, the rain came!
- So the Lord governs the fertility of the earth and also rain and drought.

The Lord Jesus Christ goes into more detail.

- Not even a sparrow dies if it is not the will of the Father.
- Also, the Lord numbered the very hairs of my head.

Now think again about everything: God planned everything in detail and He takes care that it happens according to his plan.

- The growth of every plant.
- The life of every animal.
- The plans of every person.
- The movements of every angel.

This brings us to the fourth point: Is this a matter of importance in our view of life?

- The stamp (hallmark) of God's dispensation, as He laid it down in his Counsel, characterises the lives of all of us.
- He cares for us with his most tender love.
- It is not true that things can happen to us merely by chance.

Hence we must be patient in times of sadness.

- Physical and spiritual adversity is merely a sign of our own weakness.
- But if we submit to God and believe that we serve God, accepting the troubles with resignation, then God receives us in eternal life.

- After all, we do not deserve anything better than punishment and tribulations.

But the Lord also gives us joy.

- He gives prosperity.
- He gives love.
- He gives protection.

Now consider the meaning of it all:

- God protects me in such a way that, although I experience adversity in this life, I will know only joy in the hereafter.
- Satan can spoil my life on earth, but he cannot in the hereafter where God will not allow him to do it.

Even in this life, Satan is actually powerless because he can only do what God allows him to do.

- Hence he has to humbly ask permission to enter the pigs.
- Satan cannot even let anything happen to an impure pig without the will of God!

And for this the Lord Jesus Christ also died.

- His entire life on earth and his suffering and resurrection are the strongest confirmation of God's providence.
- This Mediator was promised – in God's providence.
- He truly came – as the fulfilment of providence.
- But He will also come again to finally fulfil providence.
- He will come on the clouds to fetch us all and take us to God's kingdom – the kingdom that God provides for eternal life.

27. Q. What do you understand by the providence of God?

A. God's providence is His almighty and ever present power,[1] whereby, as with His hand, He still upholds heaven and earth and all creatures,[2] and so governs them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty,[3] indeed, all things, come not by chance[4] but by His fatherly hand.[5]

[1] Jer. 23:23, 24; Acts 17:24-28. [2] Heb. 1:3. [3] Jer. 5:24; Acts 14:15-17; John 9:3; Prov. 22:2.

[4] Prov. 16:33. [5] Matt. 10:29.

28. Q. What does it benefit us to know that God has created all things and still upholds them by His providence?

A. We can be patient in adversity,[1] thankful in prosperity,[2] and with a view to the future we can have a firm confidence in our faithful God and Father that no creature shall separate us from His love;[3] for all creatures are so completely in His hand that without His will they cannot so much as move.[4]

[1] Job. 1:21, 22; Ps. 39:10; James 1:3. [2] Deut. 8:10; I Thess. 5:18. [3] Ps. 55:22; Rom. 5:3-5; 8:38, 39. [4] Job 1:12; 2:6; Prov. 21:1; Acts 17:24-28. Amen.

Amen.

Closing prayer

Closing hymn: Psalm 128:4 (sing: *us* instead of *you*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Amen.

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Job 9:7 He **speaks** to the sun and it does not shine; he seals off the light of the stars.

Job 36:32 He fills his hands with lightning and **commands** it to strike its mark.

Job 37:15 Do you know how God **controls** the clouds and makes his lightning flash?

Psalms 71:3 Be my rock of refuge, to which I can always go; give the **command** to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.

Psalms 78:23 Yet he gave a **command** to the skies above and opened the doors of the heavens;

Psalms 91:11 For he will **command** his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;

Psalms 147:15 He sends his **command** to the earth; his word runs swiftly.

Psalms 148:5 Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he **commanded** and they were created.

Proverbs 8:29 when he gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his **command**, and when he marked out the foundations of the earth.

All these quotations from *New International Version* of the Bible.