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A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 5.1 – The Doctrine of Providence or Preservation

The Activity of God after Creation

The book of Genesis tells us that after God created the world in six days, **“He rested from all His work which He had done”** (Genesis 2:3). This means that God rested from His work of creation and did no more creating. But God did not stop working. God is not like a watchmaker who expects the watch to keep on working on its own after he has finished with it. No, God is involved with all of His creation at all times. This is what is meant by the doctrine of providence or preservation. After creating the world and everything in it, God has continued to maintain the world and all its creatures, especially His most important creation: human beings. There would be no purpose in praying to God if we did not believe that He is in charge of His creation.

The word “providence” is related to the word “provide”, which is used many times in the Scriptures. When King Saul disobeyed God’s commands and made himself unfit to be king of God’s people, God said to the prophet Samuel: **“I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons”** (1 Samuel 16:1). As human beings we make provision for the future; we are concerned about maintaining the things we have. In the same way God is concerned about everything He has, which is everything that exists, including you.

Here on earth it is vitally important that we take care of the things God has given us, particularly the people He has put in our care, like the members of our own families. Paul said to Timothy: **“If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel”** (1 Timothy 5:8). God does not tell us to do something He does not do Himself. He provides for His own, and He does it in the best possible way. This does not mean we always understand what He is doing and why He is doing it. But all of creation belongs to God, and for this reason He provides for it. David prays: **“O LORD, You preserve man and beast”** (Psalm 36:6).

Providence includes the idea that God determines to do a certain thing and then carries out His intention. It was God’s intention in the days of the prophet Isaiah to punish the Babylonians at a future time. Therefore, Isaiah says: **“The LORD of hosts has sworn, saying, ‘Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, and as I have purposed, so it shall stand... For the LORD of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it?’”** (Isaiah 14:24-27). One of the Lord’s plans is to bring this world, which He created, to an end. As Paul said to the Athenians: **“He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness”** (Acts 17:31). God will surely carry out His intentions. That day will come.

All three Persons of God are involved in the work of preservation. Psalm 104 is a psalm that praises the LORD for His creation and preservation. Here are only a few choice verses. **“O LORD, how manifold are Your works! ... These all (living things both small and great) wait for You, that You may give them their food in due season. What You give them they gather in; You open Your hand, they are filled with good. You hide Your face, they are troubled; You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the earth”** (Psalm 104:24-30). Notice that God’s Spirit is also involved in the work of preservation.

Jesus ascribed the work of preservation primarily to His Father, saying to His disciples: **“Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them”** (Matthew 6:26). And Jesus taught: **“Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will”** (Matthew 10:29).

It is clear that Jesus, the Son of God, is also involved in the daily work of preservation. When Jesus was accused of working on the Sabbath, He said to His accusers: **“My Father has been working unto now, and I have been working”** (John 5:17). When he wrote to the Colossians, Paul said this about Jesus: **“He is before all things, and in Him all things consist”** (Colossians 1:17). This means that without Jesus’ work of preservation, all of God’s creation would simply disintegrate. In Jesus all things hold together. We learn this also from Hebrews 1:3, which tells us that Jesus is **“upholding all things by the word of His power.”**

There are three levels of God’s provision for His creatures. First, it is clear that God provides for all His creatures. Second, it is clear that He cares for all human beings as His most important creation. Finally, God cares in a special way for His own dear children who put their trust in Him.

Job testified that **“the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind”** is in the LORD’s hand (Job 12:10). David added: **“The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works”** (Psalm 145:9). **“He gives to the beast its food, and to the young ravens that cry”** (Psalm 147:9). God even cares for all the inanimate things that He created also, such as sun, moon, and stars. God preserves the entire universe. David speaks of these things when he says, **“Let them praise the name of the LORD, for He commanded and they were created. He also established them forever and ever; He made a decree which shall not pass away”** (Psalm 148:5-6).

It is especially important to remember how God cares for and preserves all of His creation in our day, when so many people express fear concerning such things as climate change and disease—things that in their opinion threaten the future of our planet. We need to remember God’s clear promise that He made to Noah and his family, especially when we see a rainbow in the sky: **“While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease”** (Genesis 8:22). Yes, the world will come to an end, but until that time, we should expect the seasons to follow the same pattern from year to year. God has promised it, and He is in control.

God is particularly concerned about preserving the crown of His creation, that is, the human race. As far as earthly blessings are concerned, God makes no distinction between those who love Him and those who do not. As Jesus said: **“Your Father in heaven... makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust”** (Matthew 5:45). In fact, often the ungodly receive more earthly blessings than God’s own children. Asaph confessed: **“I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked... They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men”** (Psalm 73:3-5).

Because God has created each one of us, He also preserves each one of us. Job acknowledged this when he said: **“Your hands have made me and fashioned me, an intricate unity... Did You not pour me out like milk, and curdle me like cheese, clothe me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews? You have granted me life and favor, and Your care has preserved my spirit”** (Job 10:8-12). As part of God’s preservation of human beings, He has also determined the details of our lives, such as where we live and how long we live. Job said: **“Since his days are determined, the number of his months is with You; You have appointed his limits, so that he cannot pass”** (Job 14:5).

We, who are children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, have many assurances in God’s Word that God, our Father, is watching over us, preserving, protecting, and providing for us each and every day even to the end of our earthly lives. That is why Peter says you can rest easy, **“casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you”** (1 Peter 5:7). Listen to these reassuring words from the psalms, and feel safe at all times:

- **“Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine”** (Psalm 33:18-19).
- **“I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread”** (Psalm 37:25).

- “He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge... No evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling. ... I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him” (Psalm 91:4, 10, 15).
- “The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade at your right hand... The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore” (Psalm 121:5, 8).
- “The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth... The LORD preserves all who love Him” (Psalm 145:18, 20).

Questions

1. What did God stop doing after six days? What does He continue to do?
2. What is our God-given duty with respect to our own families?
3. How are each of the Persons of God active in the work of preservation?
4. How can the birds of the air teach us an important lesson?
5. What did Jesus mean when He said: “**I have been working**”?
6. What does the Bible say about God’s care of all His creatures?
7. Why do we not have to fear climate change and other similar events in nature?
8. What was Asaph’s complaint against God?
9. On whom does God send His rain and sunshine?
10. What promises about preservation has God given to His believers on earth?