



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 5.2 – The Doctrine of Providence or Preservation

How God Keeps and Maintains His Creatures

In the beginning God created all things. God created many things in such a way that their existence would continue through propagation. But this propagation had certain limits. We read in Genesis 1:11: **“Then God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth.’”** The same expression is used with reference to the birds, the sea creatures, and the beasts and creeping things of the earth. Reproduction is limited to **“its kind.”** This makes it clear that from the beginning God did not intend for one kind to change into another kind, nor did He make this change possible. Change is possible within the created kinds, but it not possible for one created kind to change into to another. Therefore, God keeps and maintains His creatures in their original kinds. Of course, God has allowed some of the kinds He created to die out, such as the dinosaurs.

Psalms 104 states very clearly that God continues to be involved with all His. After listing the various creatures that God made in the beginning, the psalmist says: **“These all wait for You, that You 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 104:27-30). None of God’s creatures could continue to exist for even a moment without God’s preservation. He keeps them all alive and functioning according to their purpose. This includes oceans, mountains, the sun, moon, stars, and the entire universe. God holds all of this together. The Levites in Nehemiah’s time praised the Lord in these words: **“You alone are the LORD; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all”** (Nehemiah 9:6).

Jesus reminds us that His Heavenly Father feeds the birds of the air and clothes the grass of the field (Matthew 6:26-27). Jesus added that if God feeds the birds and clothes the grass, He most certainly also preserves and maintains His foremost creatures, human beings. The apostle Paul spoke this truth to the philosophers of Athens: **“He gives to all life, breath, and all things... In Him we live and move and have our being”** (Acts 17:25, 28). These words apply not only to believers, but to all individuals. Our very existence – our life – depends on God. Our every action is possible only because our God gives us the ability to move and act. This is true of all creatures.

Human beings, including believers, tend to credit their accomplishments to themselves or to others, rather than to God. The Israelites had to be reminded over and over again that their victories over their enemies were God’s victories. They could have accomplished nothing without God. Even their enemies won their victories through the power of God working in them. Yes, God often uses His enemies to accomplish His purposes. In the days of Joshua, the Israelites acknowledged that it was God who was at work in their lives. They said: **“The LORD our God is He who brought us and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us all the way that we went and among all the people through whom we passed”** (Joshua 24:17).

Some say that God cannot possibly be interested in the details of every creature, but God tells us otherwise. Jesus said: **“Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the**

ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matthew 10:29-30). Those who are neglected by others are not neglected by God. **"The LORD watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow"** (Psalm 146:9). The believer Asaph admitted: **"Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand"** (Psalm 73:23). Even though we may sometimes feel abandoned, that is not true: **"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).

To maintain His creatures each day, God almost always uses the laws and systems that He created in the beginning. How does He feed His creatures? On the sixth day God said: **"See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth. In which there is life, I have given every green herb for food"** (Genesis 1:30). After the flood God specifically added to man's diet: **"Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you"** (Genesis 9:3). At the same time God promised: **"While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease"** (Genesis 8:22).

God ordinarily carries out His work of preservation according to natural laws that He has created from the beginning and according to the usual laws of cause and effect. God preserved the heathen people of Lystra in this way, as Paul told them: **"He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness"** (Acts 14:17). God **"sends the springs... He waters the hills... He causes the grass to grow and vegetation for the service of man"** and so on (Psalm 104:10-14). Job understood the laws of nature, for he said: **"He made a law for the rain, and a path for the thunderbolt"** (Job 28:26).

There are false teachers today who teach their followers to refuse to use some of the things God has created to preserve their lives. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses refuse blood transfusions, even when such transfusions could save their lives. The followers of Christian Science reject the use of most medicines because they argue that God cures the sick without medicine. In fact, they claim that sickness does not exist at all except in the mind.

God normally gives us food and clothing and the things we need through our own work. We work to earn money to buy things, or we work the land to grow the food we need, etc. God may keep us alive by leading us to put aside money during the good times in order to save for the bad times that may come. God is still doing the providing, but He is doing it by giving us the wisdom to save up for bad times, as Joseph saved up food from the seven good years in Egypt in preparation for the seven years of famine that were to follow.

If we refuse to use what God has given us to keep ourselves alive, we are tempting God. It is like saying to God: "I know that You have all power. Therefore, I will jump off this cliff and see whether You will keep me alive." This was what the devil told Jesus to do: **"If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you'"** (Matthew 4:6). Jesus' response is a warning for us: **"It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God'"** (Matthew 4:7).

Questions

1. How did God provide for the preservation of the plants and animals He created?
2. What is meant by the phrase found in Genesis: **“according to its kind”**?
3. What happens when God withdraws Himself from His creatures?
4. What does it mean to live and move and have our being in God?
5. Why is it wrong for us to praise ourselves for our accomplishments?
6. How do we know that God is concerned about the very least of His creatures?
7. In what way does God usually feed His creatures?
8. Why would it be wrong for us to quit working and expect God to feed us?
9. In what way do Jehovah’s Witnesses and Christian Scientists tempt God?
10. What are some of the ways in which we might tempt God today?
11. What would you say to someone who refused to take medicine that could help him?
12. In what ways are some people poor by their own fault?
13. When would it be wrong for us to save up a large sum of money for possible future needs?